THE TERMS OF SURRENDER

By LOUIS TRACY

THE WINGS OF THE MORNING
THE PILLAR OF LIGHT
THE GREAT MOGUL
THE CAPTAIN OF THE KANSAS
KARL GRIER
THE WHEEL O' FORTUNE
THE KING OF DIAMONDS
THE RED YEAR
THE MESSAGE
A SON OF THE IMMORTALS
THE STOWAWAY
CYNTHIA'S CHAUFFEUR
THE SILENT BARRIER
MIRABEL'S ISLAND
ONE WONDERFUL NIGHT
THE "MIND THE PAINT" GIRL
THE TERMS OF SURRENDER

"WHAT IS IT, DERRY?" SHE ASKED

The Terms of Surrender

BY

LOUIS TRACY

Author of
"The Wings of the Morning," "One Wonderful Night," etc., etc.

Toronto
McLeod & Allen
Publishers

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THE TERMS OF SURRENDER

CHAPTER I

AT "MacGONIGAL'S"

"HULLO, Mac!"

"Hullo, Derry!"

"What's got the boys today? Is there a round-up somewhere?"

"Looks that-a way," said Mac, grabbing a soiled cloth with an air of decision, and giving the pine counter a vigorous rub. At best, he was a man of few words, and the few were generally to the point; yet his questioner did not seem to notice the non-committal nature of the reply, and, after an amused glance at the industrious Mac, quitted the store as swiftly as he had entered it. But he flung an explanatory word over his shoulder:

"Guess I'll see to that plug myself—he's fallen lame."

Then John Darien Power swung out again into the vivid sunshine of Colorado ("vivid" is the correct adjective for sunshine thereabouts in June about the hour of the siesta) and gently encouraged a dispirited mustang to hobble on three legs into the iron-roofed lean-to which served as a stable at "MacGonigal's." Meanwhile, the proprietor of the store gazed after Power's retreating figure until neither man nor horse was visible. Even then, in an absent-minded way, he continued to survey as much of the dusty sur-

face of the Silver State as was revealed through the rectangle of the doorway, a vista slightly diminished by the roof of a veranda. What he saw in the foreground was a whitish brown plain, apparently a desert, but in reality a plateau, or "park," as the local name has it, a tab'eland usually carpeted not only with grama and buffalo grasses curing on the stem, but also with flowers in prodigal abundance and of bewildering varieties. True, in the picture framed by the open door neither grass-stems nor flowers were visible, unless to the imaginative eye. There was far too much coming and going of men and animals across the strip of common which served the purposes of a main street in Bison to permit the presence of active vegetation save during the miraculous fortnight after the spring rains, when, by local repute, green whiskers will grow on a bronze dog. Scattered about the immediate vicinity were the ramshackle houses of men employed in the neighboring gold and silver reduction works. The makeshift for a roadway which pierced this irregular settlement led straight to MacGonigal's, and ended there. As every man, woman, and child in the place came to the store at some time of the day or night, and invariably applied Euclid's definition of the nearest way between two given points, the flora of Colorado was quickly stamped out of recognition in that particular locality, except during the irrepressible period when, as already mentioned, the fierce rains of April pounded the sleeping earth and even bronze dogs into a frenzied activity. Further, during that year, now nearly quarter of a century old, there had been no rain in April or May, and precious little in March.

As the ranchers put it, in the figurative language of their calling, "the hull blame state was burnt to a cinder."

The middle distance was lost altogether; for the park sloped, after the manner of plateaus, to a deep valley through which trickled a railroad and the remains of a river. Some twenty miles away a belt of woodland showed where Denver was justifying its name by growing into a city, and forty miles beyond Denver rose the blue ring of the Rocky Mountains. These details, be it understood, are given with the meticulous accuracy insisted on by map-makers. In a country where, every year, the percentage of "perfectly clear" days rises well above the total of all other sorts of days, and where a popular and never-failing joke played on the newcomer is to persuade him into taking an afternoon stroll from Denver to Mount Evans, a ramble of over sixty miles as the crow flies, the mind refuses to be governed by theodolites and measuring rods. Indeed, the deceptive clarity of the air leads to exaggeration at the other end of the scale, because no true son or daughter of Colorado will walk a hundred yards if there is a horse or car available for the journey. Obviously, walking is a vain thing when the horizon and the next block look equidistant.

It may, however, be taken for granted that none of these considerations accounted for MacGonigal's fixed stare at the sunlit expanse. In fact, it is probable that his bulging eyes took in no special feature of the landscape; for they held an introspective look, and he stopped polishing the counter as abruptly as he had begun that much-needed operation when Power

entered the store. He indulged in soliloquy, too, as the habit is of some men in perplexity. Shifting the cigar he was smoking from the left corner of his wide mouth to the right one by a dexterous twisting of lips, with tongue and teeth assisting, he said aloud:

"Well, ef I ain't dog-goned!"

So, whatever it was, the matter was serious. It was a convention at Bison that all conversation should be suspended among the frequenters of MacGonigal's when the storekeeper remarked that he was dog-goned. Ears alrea'y alert were tuned at once to intensity. When Mac was dog-goned, events of vital importance to the community had either happened or were about to happen. Why, those words, uttered by him, common as they were in the mouths of others had been known to stop One-thumb Jake from opening a jack-pot on a pat straight! Of course, the pot was opened all right after the social avanlanche heralded by the storekeeper's epoch-making ejaculation had rolled past, or Jake's remaining thumb might have been shot off during the subsequent row.

Apparently, MacGonigal was thinking hard, listening, too; for he seemed to be following Power's movements, and nodded his head in recognition of the rattle of a chain as the horse was tied to a feeding trough, the clatter of a zinc bucket when Power drew water from a tank, and the stamping of hoofs while Power was persuading the lame mustang to let him bathe and bandage the injured tendons. Then the animal was given a drink—he would be fed later—and the ring of spurred boots on the sun-baked ground announced that Derry was returning to the store.

Power's nickname, in a land where a man's baptismal certificate is generally ignored, was easily accounted for by his second name, Darien, conferred by a proud mother in memory of a journey across the Isthmus when, as a girl, she was taken from New York to San Francisco by the oldtime sea route. The other day, when he stood for a minute or so in the foyer of the Savoy Hotel in London, waiting while his automobile was summoned from the courtyard, he seemed to have lost little of the erect, sinewy figure and lithe carriage which were his most striking physical characteristics twenty-five years ago; but the smooth, dark-brown hair had become gray, and was slightly frizzled about the temples, and the clean-cut oval of his face bore records of other tempests than those noted by the Weather Bureau. In walking, too, he moved with a decided limp. At fifty, John Darien Power looked the last man breathing whom a storekeeper in a dishevelled mining village would hail as "Derry"; yet it may be safely assumed that his somewhat hard and care-lined lips would have softened into a pleasant smile had someone greeted him in the familiar Colorado way. And, when that happened, the friend of bygone years would be sure that no mistake had been made as to his identity; for, in those early days, Power always won approval when he smiled. His habitual expression was one of concentrated purpose, and his features were cast in a mold that suggested repose and strength. Indeed, their classic regularity of outline almost bespoke a harsh nature were it not for the lurking humor in his large brown eyes, which were shaded by lashes so long, and black, and curved that most women who

met him envied him their possession. Children and dogs adopted him as a friend promptly and without reservation; but strangers of adult age were apt to regard him as a rather morose and aloof-mannered person, distinctly frigid and self-possessed, until some chance turn in the talk brought laughter to eyes and lips. Then a carefully veiled kindliness of heart seemed to bubble to the surface and irradiate his face. All the severity of firm mouth and determined chin disappeared as though by magic; and one understood the force of the simile used by a western schoolma'am, who contributed verse to the *Rocky Mountain News*, when she said that Derry's smile reminded her of a sudden burst of sunshine which had converted into a sparkling mirror the somber gloom of a lake sunk in the depths of some secluded valley. Even in Colorado, people of the poetic temperament write in that strain.

Now, perhaps, you have some notion of the sort of young man it was who came back to the dog-goned MacGonigal on that June day in the half-forgotten '80's. Add to the foregoing description certain intimate labels—that he was a mining engineer, that he had been educated in the best schools of the Far West, that he was slender, and well knit, and slightly above the middle height, and that he moved with the gait of a horseman and an athlete—and the portrait is fairly complete.

The storekeeper was Power's physical antithesis. He was short and fat, and never either walked or rode; but his North of Ireland ancestors had bequeathed him a shrewd brain and a Scottish slowness of speech that

gave him time to review his thoughts before they were uttered. No sooner did he hear his visitor's approaching footsteps than he began again to polish the pine boards which barricaded him from the small world of Bison.

Such misplaced industry won a smile from the younger man.

"Gee whizz, Mac, it makes me hot to see you work!" he cried. "Anyhow, if you've been whirling that duster ever since I blew in you must be tired, so you can quit now, and fix me a bimetallic."

With a curious alacrity, the stout MacGonigal threw the duster aside, and reached for a bottle of whisky, an egg, a siphon of soda, and some powdered sugar. Colorado i[illegible] l of local color, even to the naming of its drinks. [illegible] a bimetallic the whole egg is used, and variants [illegible] the concoction are a gold fizz and a silver fizz, wherein the yoke and the white figure respectively.

"Whar you been, Derry?" inquired the storekeeper, whose massive energy was now concentrated on the proper whisking of the egg.

"Haven't you heard? Marten sent me to erect the pump on a placer mine he bought near Sacramento. It's a mighty good proposition, too, and I've done pretty well to get through in four months."

"Guess I was told about the mine; but I plumb forgot. Marten was here a bit sence, an' he said nothin'." Power laughed cheerfully. "He'll be surprised to see me, and that's a fact. He counted on the job using up the best part of the summer, right into the fall; but I made those Chicago mechanics open up

the throttle, and here I am, having left everything in full swing."

"Didn't you write?"

"Yes, to Denver. I don't mind telling you, Mac, that I would have been better pleased if the boss was there now. I came slick through, meaning to make Denver tomorrow. Where is he—at the mill?"

"He was thar this mornin'."

Power was frankly puzzled by MacGonigal's excess of reticence. He knew the man so well that he wondered what sinister revelation lay behind this twice-repeated refusal to give a direct reply to his questions. By this time the appetizing drink was ready, and he swallowed it with the gusto of one who had found the sun hot and the trail dusty, though he had ridden only three miles from the railroad station in the valley, where he was supplied with a lame horse by the blunder of a negro attendant at the hotel.

It was his way to solve a difficulty by taking the shortest possible cut; but, being quite in the dark as to the cause of his friend's perceptible shirking of some unknown trouble, he decided to adopt what logicians term a process of exhaustion.

"All well at Dolores?" he asked, looking straight into the storekeeper's prominent eyes.

"Bully!" came the unblinking answer.

Ah! The worry, whatsoever it might be, evidently did not concern John Darien Power in any overwhelming degree.

"Then what have you got on your chest, Mac?" he said, while voice and manner softened from an unmistakably stiffening.

MacGonigal seemed to regard this personal inquiry anent his well-being as affording a safe means of escape from a dilemma. "I'm scairt about you, Derry," he said at once, and there was no doubting the sincerity of the words.

"About me?"

"Yep. Guess you'd better hike back to Sacramento."

"But why?"

"Marten 'ud like it."

"Man, I've written to tell him I was on the way to Denver!"

"Then git a move on, an' go thar."

Power smiled, though not with his wonted geniality, for he was minded to be sarcastic. "Sorry if I should offend the boss by turning up in Bison," he drawled; "but if I can't hold this job down I'll monkey around till I find another. If you should happen to see Marten this afternoon, tell him I'm at the ranch, and will show up in Main Street tomorrow P.M."

He was actually turning on his heel when MacGonigal cried:

"Say, Derry, air you heeled?"

Power swung round again, astonishment writ large on his face. "Why, no," he said. "I'm not likely to be carrying a gold brick to Dolores. Who's going to hold me up?"

"Bar jokin', I wish you'd vamoose. Dang me, come back tomorrer, ef you must!"

There! MacGonigal had said it! In a land where swearing is a science this Scoto-Hibernico-American had earned an enviable repute for the mildness of his

expletives, and his "dang me!" was as noteworthy in Bison as its European equivalent in the mouth of a British archbishop. Power was immensely surprised by his bulky friend's emphatic earnestness, and cudgeled his brains to suggest a reasonable explanation. Suddenly it occurred to him a second time that Bison was singularly empty of inhabitants that day. MacGonigal's query with regard to a weapon was also significant, and he remembered that when he left the district there was pending a grave dispute between ranchers and squatters as to the inclosing of certain grazing lands on the way to the East and its markets.

"Are the boys wire-cutting today?" he asked, in the accents of real concern; for any such expedition would probably bring about a struggle which might not end till one or both of the opposing parties ran short of ammunition.

"Nit," growled the other. "Why argy? You jest take my say-so, Derry, an' skate."

"Is the boss mixed up in this?"

"Yep."

"Well, he can take care of himself as well as anyone I know. So long, Mac. See you later."

"Ah, come off, Derry. You've got to have it; but don't say I didn't try to help. The crowd are up at Dolores. Marten's gittin' married, an' that's all there is to it. Now I guess you'll feel mad with me for not tellin' you sooner."

Power's face blanched under its healthy tan of sun and air; but his voice was markedly clear and controlled when he spoke, which, however, he did not do

until some seconds after MacGonigal had made what was, for him, quite an oration.

"Why should Marten go to Dolores to get married?" he said at last.

The storekeeper humped his heavy shoulders, and conjured the cigar across his mouth again. He did not flinch under the sudden fire which blazed in Power's eyes; nevertheless, he remained silent.

"Mac," went on the younger man, still uttering each word deliberately, "do you mean that Marten is marrying Nancy Willard?"

"Yep."

"And you've kept me here all this time! God in Heaven, Man, find me a horse!"

"It's too late, Derry. They was wed three hours sence."

"Too late for what? Get me a horse!"

"There's not a nag left in Bison. An' it'll do you no sort of good ter shoot Marten."

"Mac, you're no fool. He sent me to Sacra[illegible]to to have me out of the way, and you've seen through it right along."

"Maybe. But old man Willard was dead broke. This dry spell put him slick under the harrow. Nancy married Marten ter save her father."

"That's a lie! They made her believe it, perhaps; but Willard could have won through as others have done. That scheming devil Marten got me side-tracked on purpose. He planned it, just as David put Uriah in the forefront of the battle. But, by God, he's not a king, any more than I'm a Hittite! Nancy Willard is not for him, nor ever will be. Give me—but I know

you won't, and it doesn't matter, anyway, because I'd rather tear him with my hands."

An overpowering sense of wrong and outrage had Power in its grip now, and his naturally sallow skin had assumed an ivory whiteness that was dreadful to see. So rigid was his self-control that he gave no other sign of the passion that was convulsing him. Turning toward the door, he thrust his right hand to the side of the leather belt he wore; but withdrew it instantly, for he was a law-abiding citizen, and had obeyed in letter and spirit the recently enacted ordinance against the carrying of weapons. He would have gone without another word had not MacGonigal slipped from behind the counter with the deft and catlike ease of movement which some corpulent folk of both sexes seem to possess. Running lightly and stealthily on his toes, he caught Power's arm before the latter was clear of the veranda which shaded the front of the store.

"Whar 'r you goin', Derry?" he asked, with a note of keen solicitude in his gruff voice that came oddly in a man accustomed to the social amenities of a mining camp.

"Leave me alone, Mac. I must be alone!" Then Power bent a flaming glance on him. "You've told me the truth?" he added in a hoarse whisper.

"Sure thing. You must ha passed the minister between here an' the depot."

"He had been there—to marry them?"

"Yep."

"And everyone is up at the ranch, drinking the health of Marten and his bride?"

"Guess that's so."

Power tried to shake off the detaining hand. "It's a pity that I should be an uninvited guest, but it can't be helped," he said savagely. "You see, I was carrying out the millionaire's orders—earning him more millions—and I ought to have taken longer over the job. And, Nancy too! What lie did they tell her about me? I hadn't asked her to be my wife, because it wouldn't have been fair; yet—but she knew! She knew! Let me go, Mac!"

MacGonigal clutched him more tightly. "Ah, say, Derry," he cried thickly, "hev' you forgot you've left me yer mother's address in San Francisco? In case of accidents, you said. Well, am I ter write an' tell her you killed a man on his weddin' day, and was hanged for it?"

"For the Lord's sake, don't hold me, Mac!"

The storekeeper, with a wisdom born of much experience, took his hand off Power's arm at once, but contrived to edge forward until he was almost facing his distraught friend.

"Now, look-a here!" he said slowly. "This air a mighty bad business; but you cahn't mend it, an' ef you go cavortin' round in a red-eyed temper you'll sure make it wuss. You've lost the gal—never mind how—an' gittin' a strangle hold on Marten won't bring her back. Yer mother's a heap more to you ner that gal—now."

One wonders what hidden treasury of insight into the deeps of human nature MacGonigal was drawing on by thus bringing before the mind's eye of an unhappy son the mother he loved. But there was no gainsaying the soundness and efficiency of his judgment.

Only half comprehending his friendly counselor's purpose, Power quivered like a high-spirited horse under the prick of a spur. He put his hands to his face, as if the gesture would close out forever the horrific vision which the memory of that gray-haired woman in San Francisco was beginning to dispel. For the first time in his young life he had felt the lust of slaying, and the instinct of the jungle thrilled through every nerve, till his nails clenched and his teeth bit in a spasm of sheer delirium.

MacGonigal, despite his present load of flesh, must have passed through the fiery furnace himself in other days; for he recognized the varying phases of the obsession against which Power was fighting.

Hence, he knew when to remain silent, and, again, he knew when to exorcise the demon, once and for all, by the spoken word. It was so still there on that sun-scorched plateau that the mellow whistle of an engine came full-throated from the distant railroad. The lame horse, bothered by the tight bandage which Power had contrived out of a girth, pawed uneasily in his stall. From the reduction works, half a mile away, came the grinding clatter of a mill chewing ore in its steel jaws. These familiar sounds served only to emphasize the brooding solitude of the place. Some imp of mischief seemed to whisper that every man who could be spared from his work, and every woman and child able to walk, was away making merry at the wedding of Hugh Marten and Nancy Willard.

The storekeeper must have heard that malicious prompting, and he combated it most valiantly.

"Guess you'd better come inside, Derry," he said,

with quiet sympathy. "You're feelin' mighty bad, an' I allow you hain't touched a squar' meal sence the Lord knows when."

He said the right thing by intuition. The mere fantasy of the implied belief that a quantity of cold meat and pickles, washed down by a pint of Milwaukee lager, would serve as an emollient for raw emotion, restored Power to his right mind. He placed a hand on MacGonigal's shoulder, and the brown eyes which met his friend's no longer glowered with frenzy.

"I'm all right now," he said, in a dull, even voice; for this youngster of twenty-five owned an extra share of that faculty of self-restraint which is the birthright of every man and woman born and bred on the backbone of North America. "I took it pretty hard at first, Mac; but I'm not one to cry over spilt milk. You know that, eh? No, I can't eat or drink yet awhile. I took a lunch below here at the depot. Tell me this, will you? They—they'll be leaving by train?"

"Yep. Special saloon kyar on the four-ten east. I reckon you saw it on a sidin', but never suspicioned why it was thar."

"East? New York and Europe, I suppose?"

"Guess that's about the line."

"Then I'll show up here about half-past four. Till then I'll fool round by myself. Don't worry, Mac. I mean that, and no more."

He walked a few yards; but was arrested by a cry:

"Not that-a way, Derry! Any other old trail but that!"

Then Power laughed; but his laughter was the wail of a soul in pain, for he had gone in the direction of

the Dolores ranch. He waved a hand, and the gesture was one of much grace and distinction, because Power insensibly carried himself as a born leader of men.

"Just quit worrying, I tell you," he said calmly. "I understand. The boys will escort them to that millionaire saloon. They'll be a lively crowd, of course; but they won't see me, never fear."

Then he strode off, his spurs jingling in rhythm with each long, athletic pace. He headed straight for a narrow cleft in the hill at the back of the store, a cleft locally known as the Gulch, and beyond it, on another plateau sloping to the southeast, lay the Willard homestead.

MacGonigal watched the tall figure until it vanished in the upward curving of the path. Then he rolled the cigar between his heavy lips again until it was securely lodged in the opposite corner of his mouth; but the maneuver was wasted,—the cigar was out,—and such a thing had not happened in twenty years! To mark an unprecedented incident, he threw away an unconsumed half.

"He's crazy ter have a last peep at Nancy," he communed. "An' they'd have made a bully fine pair, too, ef it hadn't been fer that skunk Marten. Poor Derry! Mighty good job I stopped home, or he'd ha gone plumb to hell."

Of course, the storekeeper was talking to himself; so he may not have said it, really. But he thought it, and, theologically, that is as bad. Moreover, he might have electrified Bison by his language that night were he gifted with second sight; for he had seen the last of the proud, self-contained yet light-hearted and

generous-souled cavalier whom he had known and liked as "Derry" Power. They were fated to meet again many times, under conditions as varying as was ever recorded in a romance of real life; but MacGonigal had to find a place in his heart for a new man, because "Derry" Power was dead—had died there in the open doorway of the store—and a stranger named John Darien Power reigned in his stead.

CHAPTER II

THE TERMS

THE Gulch was naked but unashamed, and lay in a drowsy stupor. An easterly breeze, bringing coolness elsewhere, here gathered radiated heat from gaunt walls on which the sun had poured all day, and desiccating gusts beat on Power's face like superheated air gushing from a furnace. Not that the place was an inferno—far from it. On a June day just a year ago two young people had ridden up the rough trail on their way to the Dolores ranch, and the girl had called the man's attention to the exquisite coloring of the rocks and the profusion of flowers which decked every niche and crevice. It may be that they looked then through eyes which would have tinted with rose the dreariest of scenes; but even today, in another couple of hours, when the sun was sinking over the mountain range to the west, the Gulch would assuredly don a marvelous livery of orange, and red, and violet. Each stray clump of stunted herbage which had survived the drought would make a brave show, and rock-mosses which should be moist and green would not spoil the picture because they were withered and brown or black.

But Power, despite a full share of the artist's temperament, was blind to the fierce blending of color which the cliffs offered in the blaze of sunlight. His eyes were peering into his own soul, and he saw naught

there but dun despair and icy self-condemnation. For he blamed himself for wrecking two lives. If Nancy Willard could possibly find happiness as Hugh Marten's wife, he might indeed have cursed the folly of hesitation that lost her; but there would be the salving consciousness that she, at least, would drink of the nectar which wealth can buy in such Homeric drafts. But he was denied the bitter-sweet recompense of altruism. He knew Nancy, and he knew Marten, and he was sure that the fairest wild flower which the Dolores ranch had ever seen would wilt and pine in the exotic atmosphere into which her millionaire husband would plunge her.

Hugh Marten was a man of cold and crafty nature. Success, and a close study of its essentials, had taught him to be studiously polite, bland, even benignant, when lavish display of these qualities suited his purposes. But he could spring with the calculating ferocity of a panther if thereby the object in view might be attained more swiftly and with equal certainty. His upward progress among the mining communities of Colorado, New Mexico, and, more recently, California had been meteoric—once it began. None suspected the means until they saw the end; then angry and disappointed rivals would compare notes, recognizing too late how he had encouraged this group to fight that, only to gorge both when his financial digestion was ready for the meal. He had the faculty, common to most of his type, of surrounding himself with able lieutenants. Thus, John Darien Power came to him with no stronger backing than a college degree in metallurgy and a certificate of proficiency as a mining

engineer, credentials which an army of young Americans can produce; but he discerned in this one young man the master sense of the miner's craft, and promoted him rapidly.

He paid well, too, gave excellent bonuses over and above a high salary—was, in fact, a pioneer among those merchant princes who discovered that a helper is worth what he earns, not what he costs—and Power was actually entitled, through his handling of the Sacramento placer mine, to a sum large enough to warrant marriage with the woman he loved. Not for one instant had the assistant dreamed that his chief was casting a covetous eye on Nancy Willard. She was a girl of twenty, he a man looking ten years older than the thirty-eight years he claimed. Apparently, she was wholly unsuited to become the wife of a financial magnate. She knew nothing of the outer maze of society and politics; while it was whispered that Marten would soon run for state governor, to be followed by a senatorship, and, possibly, by an embassy. To help such ambitious emprise he needed a skilled partner, a woman of the world, a mate born and reared in the purple, and none imagined, Power least of any, that the vulture would swoop on the pretty little song-bird which had emerged from the broken-down cage of the Dolores ranch. For the place had been well named. Misfortune had dogged its owner's footsteps ever since the death of his wife ten years earlier, and Francis Willard was buffeted by Fate with a kind of persistent malevolence. Neighboring farms had been rich in metals; his was bare. When other ranchers won wealth by raising stock, he hardly held his

own against disease, dishonest agents, and unfortunate choice of markets. This present arid season had even taken from him three-fourths of his store cattle.

Power did not know yet how the marriage had been brought to an issue so speedily. In time, no doubt, he would fit together the pieces of the puzzle; but that day his wearied brain refused to act. He might hazard a vague guess that he had been misrepresented, that his absence in California was construed falsely, that the letters he wrote had never reached the girl's hands; but he was conscious now only of a numb feeling of gratitude that he had been saved from killing his usurper, and of an overmastering desire to look once more on Nancy's face before she passed out of his life forever.

He climbed the Gulch to the divide. From that point he could see the long, low buildings of the ranch, lying forlornly in the midst of empty stockyards and scorched grazing land; though the Dolores homestead itself looked neither forlorn nor grief-stricken. A hundred horses, or more, were tethered in the branding yard near the house. Two huge tents had been brought from Denver; the smoke of a field oven showed that some professional caterer was busy; and a great company of men, women, and children was gathered at that very moment near the porch, close to which a traveling carriage was drawn up. A spluttering *feu de joie*, sounding in the still air like the sharp cracking of a whip, announced that the departure of bride and bridegroom was imminent; but the pair of horses attached to the carriage reared and bucked owing to

the shouting, and Power had a momentary glimpse of a trim, neat figure, attired in biscuit-colored cloth, and wearing a hat gay with red poppies, standing in the veranda. Close at hand was a tall man dressed in gray tweed.

Mr. and Mrs. Hugh Marten were about to start on their honeymoon trip to New York and Europe!

For an instant Power's eyes were blinded with tears; but he brushed away the weakness with a savage gesture, and examined the stark rocks on each side in search of a nook whence he might see without being seen. It was the careless glance of a man maddened with well-nigh intolerable loss; yet, had he known how much depended on his choice of a refuge, even in the very crux of his grief and torment he would have given more heed to it. As it was, he retreated a few paces, until hidden from any chance eye which might rove that way from the ranch, chose a break in the cliff where an expert cragsman could mount forty feet without difficulty, and finally threw himself at full length on a ledge which sloped inward, and was overhung by a mass of red granite, all cracked and blistered by centuries of elemental war. Some stunted tufts of alfalfa grass were growing on the outer lip of the ledge. By taking off his sombrero, and peeping between the dried stems, he could overlook the cavalcade as it passed without anyone being the wiser.

The surface of the rock was so hot as to be almost unbearable; but he was completely oblivious of any sense of personal discomfort. That side of the Gulch was in shadow now, and concealment was all he cared for. He was sufficiently remote from the narrow track

to which the horses would necessarily be confined that he ran no risk of yielding to some berserker fit of rage if he encountered Marten's surprised secretary, when, perchance, he might have flung an oath at the man who had despoiled him, and thereby caused distress to the woman he loved. To avoid that calamity, he would have endured worse evils than the blistering rock.

He remembered afterward that while he waited, crouched there like some creature of the wild, his mind was nearly a blank. He was conscious only of a dull torpor of wrath and suffering. He had neither plan nor hope for the future. His profession, which he loved, had suddenly grown irksome. In curiously detached mood, he saw the long procession of days in the mines, in the mart, in the laboratory. And the nights—ah, dear Heaven, the nights! What horror of dreariness would come to him then! He seemed to hear an inner voice bidding him abandon it all, and hide in some remote corner of the world where none knew him, and where every familiar sight and sound would not remind him of Nancy Willard. Nancy Willard—she was Nancy Marten now! He awoke to a dim perception of his surroundings by hearing his teeth grating. And even that trivial thing brought an exquisite pain of memory; for Nancy, reading a book one day, came across a passage in which some disappointed rascal had "ground his teeth in baffled rage," and he had joined in her shout of glee at the notion that anyone should express emotion so crudely. So, then, a man might really vent his agony in that way! Truly, one lived and learned, and this was certainly

an afternoon during which he had acquired an intensive knowledge of life and its vicissitudes.

But now the elfin screeching of excited cowboys, and a continuous fusillade of revolvers fired in the air as their owners raced alongside the lumbering coach, announced that the wedded pair had begun their long journey. The racket of yells and shooting, heightened by weird sounds extracted from tin trumpets, bugles, and horns, drew rapidly nearer, and, at any other time, Power would have been amused and interested by the sudden eruption of life in the canyon brought about by this unwonted intrusion on its peace. A horse or so, or a drove of steers, these were normal features of existence, and no respectable denizen of the Gulch would allow such trifles to trouble his or her alert wits for a moment. But this tornado of pistol-shots and bellowing was a very different matter, and coyotes, jack-rabbits, a magnificent mountain sheep, a couple of great lizards—in fact, all manner of furred and scaly creatures—deserted lairs where they might have remained in perfect security, scampered frantically to other retreats, and doubtless cowered there till dusk.

A coyote raced up the cleft at the top of which Power was hidden; but, ere ever he had seen his enemy, man, he was aware of the hidden danger, and fled to an untainted sanctuary elsewhere. He had hardly vanished before the leading horsemen galloped into sight, and soon a motley but highly picturesque regiment of Westerners filled the trail to its utmost capacity. Both men and horses were at home in this rugged land, and raced over its inequalities at a pace which would have brought down many a rider who thinks he is a devil

of a fellow when a mounted policeman gallops after him in the park and cautions him sharply to moderate his own and his steed's exuberance. Even in the joyous abandonment of this typical western crowd there was a species of order; for they took care not to incommode the coach, a cumbersome vehicle, but the only practicable conveyance of its kind on four wheels which could be trusted to traverse that rock-strewn path. Its heavy body was slung on stout leather bands, and the wheels were low, set well apart, and moving on axles calculated to withstand every sort of jolt and strain. The driver was performing some excellent balancing feats on his perch while he egged on a willing team or exchanged yells with some other choice spirit who tore ahead when the road permitted. Among the throng were not a few women and girls from Bison. They rode astride like their men folk, and their shrill voices mingled cheerfully in the din.

Power was deaf and blind to the pandemonium and its sprites: he had eyes only for the two people seated in the coach. The ancient equipage owned low seats and lofty windows, having been built during a period when ladies' headgear soared well above normal standards; so its occupants were in full view, even at the elevation from which the unseen observer looked down.

Marten, a powerfully built man, of commanding height and good physique, clean-shaven, though the habit was far from general in the West at that date, was evidently exerting himself to soothe and interest his pallid companion. His swarthy face was flushed, and its constant smile was effortless; for he had schooled

himself to adapt the mood to the hour. As the personnel of the cavalcade changed with each headlong gallop or sudden halt, he nodded affably to the men, or bowed with some distinction to the women; for Marten knew or pretended that he knew, every inhabitant of Bison.

His wife knew them too, without any pretense; but she kept her eyes studiously lowered, and, if she spoke, used monosyllables, and those scarcely audible, for Marten had obviously to ask twice what she had said even during the fleeting seconds when the pair were visible to Power. Her features were composed almost to apathy; but the watcher from the cliff, who could read the slightest change of expression in a face as mobile to the passing mood as a mountain tarn to the breeze, felt that she was fulfilling a compact and holding her emotions in tense subjection.

He hoped, he prayed, with frenzied craving of the most high gods, that she might be moved to lift her eyes to his aery; but the petition was denied, and the last memory vouchsafed of her was the sight of her gloved hands clasped on her lap and holding a few sprigs of white heather. Now, it was a refined malignity of Fate which revealed that fact just then, because heather does not grow in Colorado, and the girl had culled her simple little bouquet from a plant which Power had given her. Once, in Denver, he had rendered some slight service to an expatriated Scot, and, when a sister from Perth joined her brother, bringing with her a pot of Highland soil in which bloomed the shrub dear to every Scottish heart, Power was offered a cutting "for luck." Great was Nancy Willard's

delight at the gift; for, like the majority of her sex, she yielded to pleasant superstition, and the fame of white heather as a mascot has spread far beyond the bounds of Great Britain.

Power might well have cried aloud in his pain when he discovered that his lost love had thought of him at the moment she was leaving her old home. Perhaps he did utter some tortured plaint: he never knew, because of what happened the instant after Nancy and her spray of heather were reft from his straining vision.

One-thumb Jake, who had loitered at the ranch for a farewell drink, rode up at a terrific pace, pulled his bronco on to its haunches alongside the coach, and by way of salute, fired three shots from a revolver as quickly as finger could press trigger.

The first bullet sang through the air not more than an inch above Power's forehead. He recalled afterward a slight stirring of his hair caused by the passing of the missile, which spat viciously against the wall of rock some ten feet above the ledge. The next two bullets struck higher, and their impact evidently disturbed the equipoise of a mass of stone already disintegrated by frost, because more than a ton of débris crashed down, pinning Power to the ledge and nearly pounding the life out of him. The resultant cloud of dust probably helped to render him unconscious. At any rate, he lay there without word or movement, and, if he were dead, his bones might have rested many a year in that strange tomb unless the curiosity of some passerby was aroused by a flock of quarreling vultures —a spectacle so common in cattle-land that the way-

farer does not deviate a hand's breadth from his path because of it.

Nancy heard the thunder of the falling rocks, and looked out. The dust pall told her exactly what had occurred, though the jubilant congratulation of the shooter by the driver would have explained matters in any event.

"Good fer you, Jake!" he shouted. "Gosh! when you're fed up on cowpunchin' you kin go minin' wid a gun!"

She saw, too, what many others saw: A rattlesnake, rudely dislodged from some deep crevice, emerged from the heap of rubbish, stopped suddenly, swelled and puffed in anger, rattled its tail-plates, and was obviously primed for combat. It seemed to change its mind, however, when a fourth bullet from the cowboy's revolver grazed a big brown rhomboid which offered a fair target just below the curved neck. There was another shower of dust and granite chips, and, when this subsided, the reptile had vanished.

Nancy sat back in the coach. Amid a chorus of laughter and jeers at what his critics were pleased to regard as bad marksmanship, Jake spurred his horse into a gallop again.

"What was it?" inquired Marten. Being on the other side of the vehicle, he was unaware of the cause of this slight commotion.

"Nothing, really," she said dully.

"Oh, come now, little woman—the crowd would not yelp at Jake for no reason."

"Well, his shots brought down some loose stones, and a rattler appeared in the middle of the heap. It

showed fight, too; but made off when Jake fired again."

"Oh, is that all? There wouldn't be a snake on the ranch if your father had kept a few pigs."

"Poor old dad couldn't keep anything—not even me!"

Her listless tone might have annoyed a weaker man; but Marten only laughed pleasantly.

"I should be very unhappy if he had insisted on keeping you," he said. "Of course, you hate having to part from him, and from a place where you have lived during a few careless years; but you will soon learn to love the big world to which I am taking you. Colorado in June is all very well; but it can't begin to compare with London in July, the Engadine in August, and Paris in September. Don't forget that the proper study of mankind is man—and woman."

And so, the line was dangled skilfully before her eyes, and the spell whispered gently into her ears, while she, mute and distraught, wondered whether the dear memories of Colorado would ever weaken and grow dim. Then she thought of Derry Power, and a film came over her blue eyes; but she bit her under-lip in brave endeavor, and forced a smile at some passing friend.

. . . . . .

Power did not remain unconscious many minutes. The last straggler among the mounted contingent was clattering through the canyon when the man who had been near death three times in the same number of seconds awoke to a burden of physical pain which,

for the time, effectually banished all other considerations.

At first he hardly realized where he was or what had happened. He was half choked with dust, and the effort of his lungs to secure pure air undoubtedly helped to restore his senses. It was humanly impossible to curb the impulse toward self-preservation, and he tried at once to free his limbs of an intolerable weight. He was able to move slightly; but the agony which racked his left leg warned him that the limb was either broken or badly sprained. His profession had often brought similar accidents within his ken, and indications of a further probable subsidence among the fallen stones—though the warning was so slight as to be negligible to the ordinary ear—told him that he must be wary, or a second avalanche might kill him outright.

By now the air was breathable, and he could see into the deserted Gulch. He was well aware that no one might be expected to pass that way during the next hour. Before returning to the feast in preparation at the ranch, the escort would await the departure of the train; while those who had not taken part in the procession would certainly remain there until darkness ended the festivities. So he had the choice of two evils. He could either possess his soul in patience until the mounted contingent began to straggle back, or risk another rock-fall.

Naturally, he understood the cause and extent of the mishap, and his present mood did not brook the delay entailed by the safer course. Raising head and shoulders by lifting himself on both hands, he con-

tried to twist round on his left side, and surveyed the position. It was bad enough, in all conscience, but might have been worse. By far the largest piece of granite had been the last to drop, and he saw that it was poised precariously on some smaller lumps. Any attempt to withdraw either of his legs (the left one was broken, beyond a doubt) would disturb its balance, and, if it toppled on his body, he would be imprisoned without hope of relief by his own effort. Rising still higher, though each inch gained cost a twinge of agony that brought sweat from every pore, he achieved a half-sitting, half-lolling posture. Then, applying his miner's aptitude to the dynamics of the problem, he packed the threatening boulder with others until it was wedged into partial security.

He had barely finished this task, which only a splendid vitality enabled him to carry through, when his eye was caught by something in the new face of the rock which seemed to fascinate him for a second or two. Then his mouth twisted in a rictus of dreadful mirth, so wrung was he with pain, yet so overcome by what he had seen.

"So that is the price!" he almost shouted, accompanying the words with others which seldom fell from his lips. "Those are the terms of surrender, eh? Well, it is a compact made in hell; but I'll keep it!"

After that, his actions savored of a maniac's cunning rather than the desire of a sane man to save his own life. Slowly, with never a groan, he extracted both legs from beneath the pile of stones. The spurs were his chief difficulty. One was held so tightly that he had to tear his foot out by main force; but luckily

it was the right foot, or he could not have done it. Something had to give way under the strain, and ultimately the spur was released by the yielding of a strap at a buckle. The torture he suffered must have been intense; but he uttered no sound save an occasional sob of effort, when all the strength of hands and wrists were needed to move one or other of the chunks of granite without dislodging the grim monster he had chained.

At last he was free. He felt the injured limb, which was almost benumbed, and ascertained beyond doubt that it was fractured below the knee. But he was safe enough, even though the precarious structure of stones collapsed, and any other victim of like circumstances would have been content with that tremendous achievement. Not so John Darien Power.

The mere fact that he need now only lie still until assistance reached him seemed to lash him into a fresh panic of energy. After a hasty glance into the canyon, obviously to find out whether or not anyone was approaching, he began to throw pieces of débris into the fissure left bare by the fall. When he had exhausted the store within reach he crawled to a new supply, and piled stone upon stone until the rock wall was covered to a height of more than two feet. Even then he was not satisfied; but moved a second time, his apparent object, if any, being to give the scene of his accident the semblance of a stone slide.

Finally, he did the maddest thing of all, lowering himself down the cleft with a rapidity that was almost inconceivable in a man with a broken leg. On reaching the level of the trail he slipped and fell. That

drew a queer sort of subdued shriek from his parched throat; but, after a moment of white agony, he began to crawl in the direction of the ranch. He chose that way deliberately, because the slope was downhill, and not so rough as in the upper part of the gorge. With care, for he meant to avoid another slip, but never halting, he dragged his crippled body fully a hundred yards from the foot of the ledge. Then he crept into the shade, at a spot where the side of the Gulch rose sheer for twenty feet, turned over on his back, and lay quietly.

He had almost reached the end of his tether. His face was drawn, and disfigured with dirt and perspiration. His eyelids dropped involuntarily, as though to shut out a world which had suddenly become savagely hostile; but his lips moved in a wan grimace, a wry parody of the generous, warm-hearted smile that people had learned to associate with Derry Power.

"My poor Nancy!" he murmured brokenly. "My dear lost sweetheart! If the Fates have bought you from me, I was no party to the deal, and I'll exact the last cent on it—I swear that by your own sprig of white heather! Someone will pay, in blood and tears, or I'll know the reason why! Yes, someone will pay! Power versus Marten, with the devil as arbitrator! Marten has won the first round; but I'll take it to a higher court. I'll choke the life out of him yet—choke —the beast!"

Of course, Power was light-headed.

CHAPTER III

SHOWING HOW POWER ACQUIRED A LIMP

If any sentient thought loomed vaguely through the haze of pain and exhaustion which enwrapped Power like a pall, it was that he would probably lie there a long time before help came; yet he had hardly uttered that half-delirious vow before he was aware of an animal snuffing cautiously around him, and the knowledge galvanized him into a species of activity. He turned on his right side, and raised himself on one hand, the fingers of which closed instinctively on a heavy stone as supplying a weapon of defense.

But his eyes rested only on a dog, a dapper fox-terrier, whose furtive curiosity changed instantly to alarm, as it retreated some distance, and barked excitedly. Then Power saw the animal's master, a stranger, or, at any rate, a newcomer, in the district, a man of about his own age, who rode a compactly-built pony with the careless ease of good horsemanship, and was dressed *de rigueur*, except for the broad-brimmed hat demanded by the Colorado sun.

Evidently the horseman was not surprised at finding someone lying in the Gulch.

"Hullo!" he cried. "Had a spill?"

Power tried to speak; but the dust and grit in his throat rendered his words almost inaud[illegible]. Then the

other understood that if, as he imagined, copious drafts of champagne had caused some unaccustomed head to reel, the outcome was rather more serious than a mere tumble. He urged the pony rapidly nearer, and dismounted, and a glance at Power's face dispelled his earlier notion.

"What's up?" he inquired in a sympathetic tone. "Are you hurt?"

Power's second effort at ordered speech was more successful. "Yes," he said. "My leg is broken."

"Ah, that's too bad. Which leg?"

"The left."

"Were you thrown?"

"No."

The stranger noted the soiled condition of the injured man's clothing. He saw that a spur had been torn off, and among the drying dirt on Power's face and hands were some more ominous streaks; since a man may not squirm in agony beneath a shower of jagged granite and escape some nasty abrasions of the skin.

"I see," he said gently. "You fell from up there somewhere," and he looked at the cliff, "tripped over that missing spur, I suppose. Well, what's to be done? Were you at the ranch? I didn't happen to come across you. Shall I take you there?"

"No, please—to Bison—to MacGonigal's store."

"Ah, yes. But it's an awkward business. You can't possibly hold yourself in the saddle. Can you stand on one leg, even for a few seconds?"

"I fear not. I'm about done."

"But if I carry you to the face of the rock there, and prop you against it?"

"Yes, I'll do that."

This friend in need pulled the reins over the pony's head, passed them through his arm, lifted Power, not without some difficulty, and brought him to a spot where the precipice rose like a wall.

"There you are!" he gasped; for he was of slender proportions, and Power's weight was deceptive, owing to his perfect physical fitness. "Now I'll mount, and hold you as comfortably as I can; but I don't know how this fat geegee will behave under a double load, so I must have my hands free at first. Will you grip me tight? It may hurt like sin——"

"Go right ahead!" said Power.

Sure enough, when the pony found what was expected of him, he snorted, raised head and tail, and trotted a few indignant paces.

The rider soon quieted him to a walk; but they were abreast of the scene of Power's accident before he was aware that the man clasping his body had uttered neither word nor groan, though the prancing of the horse must have caused him intense agony.

"By Jove!" came the involuntary cry, "you've got some sand! I'd have squealed like a stuck pig if I was asked to endure that. Who are you? I'm Robert H. Benson, Mr. Marten's private secretary."

"My name is Power," was the answer, in a thick murmur.

"Bower?"

"No—Power."

"Not John Darien Power, who was at Sacramento!"

"Yes."

"Gee whizz! I've written you several letters. You remember my initials, R. H. B.?"

"Yes."

"Can you talk? Say if you'd rather not."

"No, no. It's all right. Anyhow—I'd—sooner—try."

"Does the boss know you're here?"

"I guess not. I wrote him—to Denver; but he's been engaged—otherwise."

"Ra-ther! Getting wed. You've heard? I'm sure you're as much surprised as any of us. You could have knocked me down with a feather when he told me why I was wired to come West by next train from New York. 'I want you to take hold,' he said. 'I'm off to Europe for six months on my wedding trip.' That was the day before yesterday, and here he's gone already! I had a sort of notion, too, that our beloved employer would never take unto himself a wife, or, if he did, that the U. S. A. would hear about it."

A hard smile illuminated the pallor of Power's face. "Marten doesn't hire a brass band when he has any startling proposition in mind," he said.

Benson laughed. He was a cheerful, outspoken youngster—exactly the kind of private secretary the secretive millionaire might have been expected to avoid like the plague, if Marten had not chosen him deliberately because of those very qualities.

"No," he chuckled. "You and I know that, don't

we? But signing on for a wife is a different matter to securing an option on a placer mine. I should have thought there would be things doing when H. M. joined the noble army of benedicts, especially after he had sorted out such a daisy. . . . Sorry, Power! The peak of this saddle must be dashed uncomfortable. And, perhaps, I'm not carrying you to rights. One ought to be taught these things. Now, a cavalry soldier would be trained in the art of picking up a wounded mate, and in carrying him, too."

"It's not far. I can last out."

"You don't mind having a pow-wow? Guess you prefer it? You knew Miss Willard, I suppose? By the way, were you coming to the wedding?"

"No. I am here by chance."

"Well, of course, I rather fancied that. If I had been asked offhand how much time that Sacramento job would use up, I should have said another three months, at least. Is all the machinery there?"

"Yes."

"Pumps, and all?"

"Yes."

"Sorry if I appear inquisitive, but——"

"The pumps are working. I got a hustle on the contractors."

"Great Scott! I should think so, indeed. They'll make a song about it in Chicago. Have you sent in the consulting engineer's certificate?"

"Yes. It's in Denver."

"Then I'll tell you something that is good for broken legs. The boss was talking of you only yesterday. He said you were to collect five thousand

dollars when that placer mine was in shape. He forgets nothing, does he?"

"Nothing."

Power's stricken state was sufficient excuse for any seeming lack of gratitude, and his rescuer's mind reverted to the more immediate topic of the marriage.

"I asked if you were acquainted with Miss Willard," he went on. "Naturally, you must have seen her often. She was born and bred on this ranch, I believe."

"Bred here, yes; but born near Pueblo, I've been told."

"Say, isn't she a peach?"

"A pretty girl, very."

"Rather quiet, though. Kind of subdued, to my taste. Life on the Dolores ranch must have been a mighty tough proposition, I imagine. But she'll brighten up as Mrs. Marten. They all do."

"Is Marten a sultan, then?"

The private secretary chortled over the joke. "I'm jiggered if I could have pulled off a wheeze like that if I had been chucked off a cliff and my leg was out of gear!" he cried. "No, my boy, Marten has a clean record in that respect. I've never known him look twice at any woman; though he's had chances in plenty. What I mean is that these sweet young things who have never seen a real store, and don't know sable from dyed rabbit, wake up amazingly when they're Mrs. Somebody of Somewhere. Look at Mrs. Van Pieter! A year ago she was keeping tab on people who hired her father's canoes at Portland, Maine,

and it's hardly a week since I met her in Tiffany's, matching pearls at a thousand dollars a pick."

"What were you doing in Tiffany's?"

The question seemed to take Benson by surprise; but, though he might be talkative as a parrot, he did not discuss his employer's personal behests.

"Having a look around," he said.

"I thought you might be buying Mrs. Marten's wedding gift," went on Power.

"Well, as a guesser, you'd come out first in a prize competition."

"It was—just—curiosity. I wondered—what—Marten gave her."

"That's no secret. She wore it today. A collarette of diamonds."

"Ah, a collar! Has it a golden padlock? Is there a leash?"

"Say, now! Aren't you feeling pretty bad? We're going downhill, and it jolts. But we're near that store. What's the name?"

"MacGonigal's."

"To be sure. I had forgotten. Queer fellow, the proprietor. Looks like a character out of one of Bret Harte's novels. Is there a doctor in Bison?"

"Yes—of a sort. He's sober, some days."

"Let's hope this is one of the days."

"Drunk or sober, he can pull a leg straight and tie it in splints."

"But it ought to be fixed in plaster of Paris. That's the latest dodge. Then you'll be able to hobble about in less than a month. Why, here's the

storekeeper himself. He must have been looking this way."

"He was expecting me. I promised to meet him about four o'clock."

"Well, you're on time."

"Thanks to you."

"Ah, come off! A lot I've done; though I do believe it was better to keep up a steady flow of chatter than to be asking you every ten yards how you were feeling. . . . Hi, there! I've brought your friend Power; but he's in rather bad shape. Had a fall up in the Gulch, and one leg is crocked."

The pony needed no urging to halt, and Power, whose head was sunk between his shoulders, looked as if he would become insensible again at the mere thought of renewed exertion.

"A fall!" repeated MacGonigal, moving ponderously to the near side, and peering up into Power's face. "Well, ef I ain't dog-goned! What sort of a fall?"

"Just the common variety—downward," said Benson. "His left leg is broken below the knee. Can you hold him until I hitch this fiery steed to a post? Then I'll help carry him to a bedroom. After that, if I can be of any use, tell me what to do, or where to go—for the doctor, I mean."

By this time MacGonigal had assured himself that Power's clothing was not full of bullet-holes, and he began to believe that Benson, whom he recognized, was telling the truth.

"Give him to me," he said, with an air of quiet self-confidence. "Back of some sugar casks in the

warehouse thar you'll find a stretcher. Bring that along, an' we'll lay him in the veranda till the doc shows up."

Soon the hardly conscious sufferer was reposing with some degree of comfort in a shaded nook with his back to the light. MacGonigal, whose actions were strangely deft-handed and gentle for so stout a man, was persuading him to drink some brandy.

"He has collapsed all at once," said Benson commiseratingly. "He perked up and chatted in great shape while I was bringing him through the Gulch."

"Did he now? . . . Yes, Derry, it's me, Mac. Just another mouthful. . . . An' what did he talk about, Mr. Benson?"

"Oh, mostly about the wedding, I guess."

"Nat'rally. He'd be kind of interested in hearin' how Marten had scooped up Nancy Willard."

Some acrid quality in the storekeeper's tone must have pierced the fog which had settled on Power's brain. He raised a hand to push away the glass held to his lips.

"Say, I've only secured a broken leg, Mac," he murmured, smiling into the anxious face bent over him. "I don't want to be doped as well. Perhaps Mr. Benson will mount that nag of his, and bring Peters."

"Look-a here, Derry, hadn't we better send to Denver?"

"No. Peters has set dozens of legs and arms."

"I guess he's back at the ranch. He went thar, an' I hain't seen him among the crowd."

"Is he a tall, red-whiskered chap, with a nose that needs keeping out of the sun?" broke in Benson.

"Yep. That's him."

"Well, he's there now—and—not so bad. Does he really understand bone-setting?"

"Sure. He's all to rights when not too much in likker."

"I'll have him here in half an hour."

Benson whistled to the dog, and they heard the clattering hoofbeats of the cob's hurried departure. MacGonigal brought a chair, and sat by his friend's side.

"Was it a reel tumble, Derry?" he asked softly.

"Seems like it, Mac. Don't worry your kind old fat head. No one saw me. Let me lie quiet now, there's a good soul. I've done enough thinking for today."

"Say, Boy, kin yer smoke?"

"No—not till the doc is through."

MacGonigal bit the end off a cigar, bit it viciously, as if he were annoyed at it. Then he struck a match by drawing it sharply along the side of his leg, and lit the cigar; but not another word did he utter until a thunder of hoofs disturbed the hot silence of the afternoon.

"Guess that's some of the boys comin' from the depot," whispered Mac. "They'll not suspicion you're here, Derry, an' I'll soon have a stampede by tellin' 'em the doc is loose among the bottles."

True to his promise, he got rid of the thirsty ones quickly; for this smaller batch had not even awaited the departure of the train.

"Air you awake, Derry?" he inquired, when he had crept back softly to his chair.

"Yes."

"What's this yarn about One-thumb Jake shootin' a rattler?"

"I—don't know. He didn't shoot me, Mac. I got slammed on a rock, good and hard."

"I on'y axed because I'm nearly fed up with Jake an' his gun-play."

"Ah, quit it, you sleuth. Jake wouldn't pull his gun on me, not even at Marten's bidding."

"He kin be the biggest damn fool in Bison when he's loaded. Anyhow, I'll take your say-so."

There was another period of quietude, when brooding thought sat heavy on MacGonigal, and pain gnawed Power with its sharpest tooth. Then came the sound of galloping horses again, and Benson appeared, guiding a big man who rolled in his walk; for the fast canter had stirred many varieties of alcohol in an overburdened system. The private secretary's voice was raised in order that the others might hear.

"I would advise you to bandage the limb sufficiently to give Mr. Power some sort of ease until Dr. Stearn comes from Denver," he was urging. "I am sure that Mr. Marten would wish this case to be attended by his own doctor, and I know that Dr. Stearn attends him."

"Stearn! What does that old mutt know about surgery?" shouted Peters. "I could set a compound fracture while he was searching around for his eyeglasses. . . . Hullo, Mac! You're always the right

man in the right place. Bring me a highball, to clear the dust out of the pipes."

"You jest fix Derry first, Peters, an' you kin hev two highballs."

The red-whiskered man, whose medical degree was a blend of sheer impudence and a good deal of rough-and-ready experience, knew MacGonigal so well that he did not attempt to argue.

"Very well," he said sulkily. "Break up an egg box, and saw it into eighteen-inch lengths, four inches wide. You have a roll of lint and scissors? I'll rip up his trousers, and have a look at the place."

His actions were decided, but somewhat awkward. When Power winced because of a careless handling of the injured limb, he only guffawed.

"Nips you a bit!" he grunted. "Of course it does. I'd like to know what you expected. Did you fancy you could flop over the Gulch like a crow? . . . Oh, here we are! Just an ordinary smash. Hurry up with those splints, Mac. Now, just set your teeth and grin hard while I pull. . . . There! Did you hear it? I'll not hurt you more than I can help while I do the dressing. Got any bromide in that den of yours, Mac? Well, give him a ten-grain dose every three hours till he sleeps. Get the rest of his clothes off, keep him in bed for three weeks, and the rest may be left safely to Nature. Gee whizz! I'm chewing mud. Where in hell do you keep your whisky?"

"Doctor" Peters had a professional manner which did not inspire confidence; but he seemed to understand what he was about, and Benson, when he could be of no further service, went to the reduction mill,

where he had business which detained him until a late hour. Next morning, on his way to Denver, he called at the store, and visited Power, who was feeling a great deal better, and was confident that the damaged limb would soon be as sound as ever.

"I hope you won't think it necessary to trouble Mr. Marten with any report of my accident," went on the invalid. "You see, in a sort of a way, it happened in connection with his marriage, as I was watching the festivities when it happened—had my eyes anywhere but where they ought to be, I suppose—and if his wife came to hear of it she might take it to heart. Sometimes a woman has odd notions about such things occurring on her wedding day."

"Right you are," agreed Benson cheerfully.

A remark dropped by the manager of the mill had supplied a reason for the young engineer's interest in the marriage, and he had come to the conclusion that the sooner the whole affair was forgotten the better it would be for all parties.

"I'll be in Denver till September or thereabouts; but I'll be seeing you long before then," he continued. "What about squaring your account? I think I have all the details in the office."

"Pay what is coming to me by check to Smith & Moffat's bank," said Power. "They'll let me know when they get the money, and you can mail a receipt here for my signature. By the way, I wish to resign my position on Marten's staff as from yesterday."

"Sorry to hear that. Do you really mean it?"

"Yes."

"Then I'll put that through, also. Goodby, old

chap, and good luck. You'll be well looked after, I suppose?"

"I couldn't be in better hands than Mac's. If he didn't own a hard head, his big heart would have ruined him long ago."

"An unusual combination," laughed Benson, and his eyes met Power's quizzically. "Well, so long! Let me know if I can do anything."

Beyond the purely business formalities connected with the payment of Power's salary and the acceptance of his resignation, Benson heard little of him until ten days later, when a telegram reached him in the early morning. It was from MacGonigal, and read:

"Don't like the look of Power's leg. Send doctor."

That afternoon Benson brought Dr. Stearn to the store, and MacGonigal explained that from some remark grunted by Peters when quite sober, and from personal observation, he was not satisfied with the appearance of Power's injured limb. The doctor, a fully qualified medical man, was very wroth with Peters when he had made a brief examination of the patient.

"This is the work of an incompetent quack," he said angrily. "Whoever the man may be, he is the worst sort of idiot—the sort that knows a little of what he is doing. The splints and bandaging have served their purpose only too well, because callous is forming already. Unless you wish to have one leg half an inch shorter than the other during the rest of your life, Mr. Power, you must let me put you under ether."

"Why?" came the calm-voiced question.

"To put it plainly, your leg should be broken again, and properly set."

"What is wrong with it?"

"You know you have two bones in that part of the leg which is below the knee, the tibia and the fibula? Well, they were broken—by a blow, was it? No, a fall—well, they practically amount to the same thing, though there are indications that this injury was caused by a blow——"

"He fell off one rock onto another, doctor," put in Benson.

"Ah, yes! That accounts for it. As I was saying, they were broken slantwise, and now, instead of being in correct apposition, the upper parts override the lower ones. Do you follow?"

"Suppose they are not interfered with, will they heal all right?" said Power.

"Y-yes," came the grudging admission; "but you'll walk with a limp."

"Bar that, the left leg will be as strong as the right one?"

"Stronger, in that particular place. Nature does some first-rate grafting, when the stock is young and exceptionally healthy."

Power smiled, almost with the compelling good-humor of other days. "Then I'll limp along, Doctor," he said. "I have things to do, and this enforced waste of time is the worst feature of the whole business. It is very good of you to come out here, and more than kind of Mr. Benson to accompany you; but I won't, if I can avoid it, endure another ten days like the sample I have just passed through."

"You'll regret your decision later. There's no means of adding that half inch afterward, you know."

"I quite understand, Doctor. It's a limp for life."

Dr. Stearn felt the calf muscles and tendons again, and pressed the region of the fracture with skilled gentleness.

"It's a pity," he growled. "You've made a wonderful recovery. If, when you are able to hobble about, you meet this rascal, Peters, and shoot him, call me as a witness in your behalf. It would be a clear case of justifiable homicide!"

So that is how John Darien Power acquired the somewhat jerky movement which characterizes his walk today; though the cause of it is blurred by the mists of a quarter of a century. The red-whiskered Peters was shot long ago, not by Power, but by an infuriated miner from whose jaw he had wrenched two sound teeth before discovering the decayed stump which led to this display of misplaced energy. It was well that such impostors should be swept out of the townlets of Colorado, even if the means adopted for their suppression were drastic. They wrought untold mischief by their pretensions, and brought hundreds of men and women to needless death. They did some little good, perhaps, in communities where physicians and surgeons were few and far between; but their rough and partly successful carpentry of the human frame did not atone for the misery they inflicted in cases which demanded a delicately exact and scientific diagnosis. At any rate, they have gone, never to be seen again in Colorado, and the precise manner of their departure,

whether by rum, or lead, or wise and far-reaching laws, does not concern this narrative.

What does concern it most intimately is the first use Power made of his limping steps; for upon their direction and daily increasing number depended the whole of his subsequent history. Life still held for him certain rare and noteworthy phases—developments which, when viewed through the vista of many years, seemed as inevitable and preordained as the ordered sequence of a Greek tragedy. Yet, on the day he hobbled out into the sunshine again, it was just the spin of a coin whether he rode to the Dolores ranch or took train for Denver, and it is safe to say that had he done the one thing instead of the other his future career must have been drawn into an entirely different channel.

At least, that is the way men reason when they review the past, and single out some trivial act which apparently governed their destinies; whereat, in all probability, the gods smile pityingly, for the lives of some men cannot be the outcome of idle chance, and John Darien Power's life was assuredly no commonplace one.

CHAPTER IV

THE SUDDEN RISE OF PETER MacGONIGAL

A FOUR-WHEELED buggy, with springs, the only vehicle of its kind in Bison, had been hired for Power's first outing. During a whole week toward the close of July he had stumped about on a crutch, and, when the great day arrived that he was able to crawl slowly to and fro in the veranda with the aid of a stick, he announced to the watchful MacGonigal that henceforth he was "on the job again."

On that memorable occasion, while Derry was showing off the new-found accomplishment of walking, an elderly man, white-haired and wiry, but of small stature, rode by on a mettlesome mustang. Power's face grew hard when he met the rider's stare of astonishment; but the expression fled instantly, and he waved a friendly greeting, which, however, received the curtest of responses, while the horse unexpectedly found his head free for a canter.

MacGonigal, whose big eyes lost nothing within range, noted the bare nod which acknowledged Power's salute.

"Old man Willard held out the marble mitt that-a time, Derry," said he.

Power did not reply for a moment. When he answered, he quoted Dryden's couplet:

"Forgiveness to the injured doth belong;
But they ne'er pardon who have done the wrong."

"Good fer you, Derry!" exclaimed the storekeeper appreciatively. "I've often wondered what you was connin' to yerself up thar," and he jerked his head in the direction of Power's bedroom; "but I never allowed it was po'try."

"You were not mistaken, Mac. I was hard at work on dry prose. Those lines are not mine. They were written before Colorado was christened, and they will be true until men attain the millennium."

"Huh!"

MacGonigal took refuge in a noncommittal grunt, because he fancied that the millennium was the name of a Chicago vaudeville house, and, somehow, the notion did not seem to fit into its right place in the conversation.

"For all that," mused Power aloud, "I'll call on Mr. Francis Willard, tomorrow."

So this resolution explained the light conveyance standing outside the store next morning. Power was in the act of settling himself as comfortably as might be beside the driven, when One-thumb Jake galloped down the slope leading from the Gulch. The cowboy pulled up in the approved style of his tribe, swung out of the saddle, and banged into the veranda a decrepit portmanteau, which he had been carrying in the thumbless hand.

"Room an' drink fer a single gent!" he shouted. "I'm an orfin, I am, a pore weak critter slung out inter a crool world!"

"You're never leaving the Willard outfit, Jake?" said Power, who might well be surprised, since the man had been connected with the Dolores ranch since the first lot of cattle was turned loose on its pastures.

"That's about the size of it," said the other.

"But why?"

"The old man says, 'Git!' an' I got."

"No reason?"

"Wall, if you squeeze it outer me, I'll be squoze. In a sort of a way, it had ter do with you."

"With me?"

"Yes, sir. The boss says ter me yestiddy, 'Why is Derry Power hangin' roun' Mac's?' Says I, 'He bruk his leg.' 'Pity he didn't break his neck,' says the boss, an', seein' as you'se a friend of mine, I didn't agree with any sich sentiments, an' tole him the same. He kind o' curled up then; but this mornin' he gev me the perlite push,—said as he was quittin' Bison fer a spell, an' the ranch would be shut down. Anyways, Derry, I'm mighty glad ter see you hoppin' aroun'. Git down outer that rig, an' hev a sociable drink."

Power consulted his watch, and seemed to arrive at some decision on the spur of the moment.

"Can't wait now," he said. "You'll be here this evening?"

"Sure."

"Then I'll be around, and I may table a proposition that will please you. Jim," this to the driver, "beat it to the depot. I want to make the ten o'clock to Denver, and we have only twenty minutes."

MacGonigal, as usual a silent auditor, gazed after the cloud of dust raised by horse and buggy, and was

minded, perhaps, to say something. Whatever may have been his first intent, he repressed it.

"What's yer pizen, Jake?" he inquired, and the cowboy named it.

Late that night Power returned. He was so tired that he had practically to be carried to bed; but he contrived to tell the storekeeper that Jake should remain in Bison at his (Power's) expense until certain business conditions had developed. Next day he was too exhausted to take any exercise; but sat in the veranda after breakfast, smoking and chatting with the habitués, whose varied surmises he shared, when a stranger whizzed through the township in the buggy, vanished in the direction of the Gulch, and returned with equal celerity of movement a couple of hours subsequently.

"Looks like a lawyer," said some wiseacre. "Them fellers air allus on a hair-trigger when a mortgage falls in."

"Is Willard's time up?" inquired another man.

"Thar was talk about it afore this dry spell kem an' cleared him out. Of course——"

The speaker stopped suddenly. He was on the point of alluding to Nancy's marriage, when he remembered that Power was present, and, in such circumstances, it is safe to assume that a gathering of rough western miners will display more real courtesy and consideration for the feelings of others than may be forthcoming in far more pretentious circles.

"No need to trip your tongue on my account," laughed Power, reaching lazily for a glass of milk and seltzer. "You were going to say, I suppose, that when

Mr. Willard's daughter married a rich man the mortgage difficulty would disappear."

"Somethin' like that, Derry," was the answer.

"Did you ever hear the amount of the mortgage?"

"Five thousand, I was told."

Power laughed again. "Five thousand!" he cried. "Surely Nancy Willard cost more than that! Why, Marten gave me that amount as a rake-off on one job I put through for him this spring."

The words were bitter as gall, though uttered in a tone of quiet banter. None spoke in reply. Each man there had seen Power and the girl scampering together through Bison on their ponies so often that the two were marked down by good-natured gossip as "made for each other." Sympathy now would be useless and misplaced; so there was silence for awhile, until a safer and collectively interesting topic was broached by MacGonigal.

"Kin anybody here tell me what's going on at the mill?" he asked suddenly.

The "mill," as the agency through which many thousands of tons of low-grade telluride ore were transmuted weekly into a certain number of ounces of gold and silver, was the breath of life to Bison. If it stopped, the greater part of the little town's inhabitants was aware instantly of bare cupboards and empty pockets. Work might cease at the mines for varying periods without causing vital harm to the community; but the metal pulses of the mill must beat with regularity, or Bison suffered from a severe form of heart disease. Consequently, there was no rush to volunteer information; though some of those present had had their sus-

picions that all was not as it should be with the giant whose clamant voice rang ever in their ears.

"Some books and things was carted from the office to Denver a-Wednesday," said the know-all who had spoken about the mortgage.

"Why?"

The storekeeper's tone was ominous, and the other man grinned uneasily.

"Guess it's what they call an audit," he said.

"Thar's been two audits a year fer ten years at Bison, an' the books hev never gone ter Denver afore."

"Page has been nosin' around, too, like as if he was takin' stock," put in a feeder, whose task it was to guide and shovel ore into the rolls.

"Page oughter know what's in the mill by this time," said MacGonigal, and indeed, the personage under discussion being the manager, the statement was almost excessively accurate.

"Thar was talk in the papers awhile sence about some new process fer treatin' low-grade ores," commented the feeder, apropos of nothing in particular. Then he seemed to wake into cheerful activity. "But what's the use o' meetin' trouble halfways?" he cried. "Goldarn it! people said the mines was peterin' out more'n a year ago, an' we're workin' full spell this yer week. . . . Who's fer a fizz? I go on at six, an' I hev to eat a line fust."

That evening, before the store filled with the day men, and Power alone was listening, MacGonigal was more outspoken.

"I've a notion that the mill is goin' ter close down, Derry," he said glumly.

"Probably, for a time," said Power.

Such prompt agreement was unexpected; but MacGonigal passed it without comment.

"Nit—fer good. They lost the main vein a year last Christmas, an' the treatin' of ounce ore has been a bluff whiles they s'arched high an' low beyond the fault. No, Derry, Bison is busted. Me for Denver tomorrow, an' any fellar kin hev this store at a vallyation, wid a good rake-off, too—dang it!"

Power was smoking placidly, and the gloomy prophecy of his friend did not appear to disturb him. He even affected to ignore the sigh with which MacGonigal turned away after gazing at him with an expression akin to dismay; for the stout man had the constitutional dislike of his kind to change, and the store had yielded a steady income since the inception of Bison.

"Say, Mac," said Power after a long pause, "if you were to dig deep down into your pants, how much could you ante up?"

"Eight thousand dollars, ef I kep' a grubstake," came the instant response.

"And what is the mill worth?"

"It cost the best part of a hundred an' fifty thousand."

"I asked you what it is worth."

"What it'll fetch."

"Can you figure it out?"

"There's on'y the movable plant. A lot of money is sunk in cyanide vats, an' rails, an' buildin's. Guess, when you come ter whittle it down ter rolls an' engines,

less the cost of takin' 'em ter pieces an' fixin' 'em anywhar, you'd git 'em fer twenty thousand."

"And plenty, too, for a mill erected ten years ago to deal with high-grade ore. You see, Mac, the scientific treatment of rich ores has developed so rapidly of late that the Bison mill is practically a back number; while we know that it cannot compete with the low-grade extractions now practised in Cripple Creek and at Leadville. No, you must cut down your estimate. When you buy that mill, Mac, you shouldn't spring a cent beyond fifteen thousand, and begin by offering ten. At best, it would only form a nucleus for real work."

"Me—buy—the—mill!" MacGonigal permitted himself to be astounded to the point of stupefaction.

"Yes, that is what will happen. But not a word of this to anyone. Start in and sell the store, by all means; provided you fix its value on the basis of live business, likely to improve."

"Derry, air you wool-gatherin', or what?"

"Unless I am greatly mistaken, Mac, you and I will gather as much wool during the next twelve months as we are likely to need for the remainder of our lives. I may be wrong, of course, but you will be perfectly safe. You will grab the mill at its breaking-up price, and you should sell the store in any event. All I ask is that you act strictly according to my instructions. It is hardly necessary to repeat that you must keep the proposition to yourself."

These two knew each other thoroughly; though MacGonigal was well aware that certain unfathomable characteristics had developed of late in the once carefree

and even-minded youngster for whom he felt an almost parental tenderness. He made no reply. He asked no question. He knew that when the time came Power would speak, but not until the scheme he had in mind, whatever it might be, was ripe for action. Indeed, ever since the accident, Power had displayed some of the attributes which caused men to hate and fear Marten. He, whose laugh had been the merriest and human sympathies the most marked among all the men who had passed in review before the storekeeper's bulbous eyes, was now apt to lapse into a cold cynicism, an aloofness of interest, a smiling contempt for the opinions and wishes of his fellows, which had puzzled and saddened his one stanch friend. But MacGonigal's confidence in him had not diminished. Rather was he aware of a broadening and strengthening of qualities already remarkable, and he hugged the belief that, as the image of Nancy Willard faded into impenetrable mists, Power would come back to his erstwhile sane and wholesome outlook on life.

So the stout man did not even trouble to put into words the assurance that he might be trusted to hold his tongue as to possible occurrences at Bison. After a prolonged stare at a glorious sunset which silhouetted the Rocky Mountains in a rich tint of ultramarine against a sky of crimson and gold, he executed that unaided transit of a cigar across his mouth for which he was noted, and when he spoke it was only to assure the section of Colorado visible through the door that he was dog-goned.

Thereafter events moved with the swiftness which

at times seems to possess the most out-of-the-way places in America like a fever.

The stranger whose guise suggested a lawyer to the quidnuncs of Bison was not seen again in the township during the ensuing fortnight; but affrighting rumor, which soon became deadly fact, told of the mill closing down for lack of paying ore. Mr. Page, Marten's representative, promised the sorrowing people that work would be found for everyone elsewhere. Though this guarantee alleviated the crushing effect of the blow, there was much grieving over the loss of more or less comfortable homes which had been won from the wilderness by years of patient effort. Men and women, even in strenuous America, twine their heart-strings around stocks and stones, and the threatened upheaval was grievous to them. It meant the breaking up of families and friendships, a transference to new districts and a strange environment, a scattering of the household gods which might never reassemble in the old and familiar order. Amid the general unrest none gave much heed to the news that the Dolores ranch had found a new owner—who, by the way, according to the joyous version of the foreman, One-thumb Jake, meant to raise horses instead of cattle—but all Bison felt its hair lifting in amazement when the *Rocky Mountain News* announced that Mr. Hugh Marten had sold the mill to Mr. Peter MacGonigal for a sum unnamed, but variously estimated between the ridiculous (though actual) price of twelve thousand dollars (toward which one-half was contributed by a mortgage on mill and ranch) and five times the amount as representing its cheap acquisition as a going concern.

Every practical miner knew that the ore bodies in the mines were exhausted, and many and quaint were the opinions privately uttered as to Mac's sanity. Even the astute Page—once the deeds were signed and the money paid—expressed the hope that the storekeeper would not rue his bargain.

"Of course," he said diplomatically, "you may find purchasers for some of the plant; but milling machinery is a special thing, and you will be lucky if you sell the stuff soon. I suppose you have a purpose in view for the buildings?"

"Guess there's some stuff ter be found in the tailin's, an' a few pockets of ore in the mines," said MacGonigal.

The manager shook his head. "You can take it from me that when Marten sucks an orange there isn't much juice left for the next fellow," he said. "You bought the place with your eyes open, and I still think you may get your money back, with a small profit; but I advise you strongly not to lose a day in advertising the rolls and accessories, while the man who has taken over the Dolores ranch may buy the buildings. They will come in useful as barns."

"I'll chew on that proposition," said MacGonigal.

Page thought him slightly cracked; but shook hands affably, and caught the next train for Denver. He was completely flabbergasted when an assistant whom he had deputed to superintend the removal of Bison's citizens to new spheres of labor informed him that Messrs. Power and MacGonigal were signing on the whole of the miners and mill-hands at established rates of pay, and that operations were to be started forth-

with on a new strike in the Gulch. When he had recovered somewhat from the shock of this announcement he strolled into the government record offices, and examined the registry of recent mining claims. There he found that a location certificate had been obtained by John Darien Power for 1,500 feet by 300 feet on a well defined crevice, at least 10 feet deep, situated in the Gulch, Dolores Ranch, Bison, in the county of Bison and state of Colorado. Other certificates had been issued to cover more than a mile of the main contact, and, to clench the mining right, John Darien Power figured as the legal owner of the land. In a word, he was "a valid discoverer" on his own property.

Page was a shrewd man, and he did not commit the error of underestimating the ability of the rival who had engineered this subtle stroke.

"I'm buncoed this time, and no mistake," he muttered, and hurried back to his office, pallid with wrath and foreboding.

There he met Benson, and told him what had happened. The private secretary, rather staggered at first, regained his complacency when he had glanced through some letters and cablegrams received from their common chief.

"The boss has approved of every move in the game," he said, with a half-hearted laugh. "You see, here he authorizes us to take even less than MacGonigal paid for the mill, and, when Willard repaid the loan, he refused to accept it, but cabled that the money was a gift from Mrs. Marten. So I don't think he can hold us responsible."

"It's not the responsibility I'm kicking at, but the

smooth way in which I was bested," growled Page. "Now, who'd have thought Power had it in him?"

"Well, I would, for one," said Benson.

"Why, you hardly knew him."

"I met him under exceptional conditions."

"But how the deuce did he manage to locate that lost vein—I suppose that is what he has found?"

"Perhaps it was a gift from the gods."

"I do wish you'd talk sense," said the irritated manager.

"What *you* would call sense might not pass for wisdom on Olympus," smiled Benson.

"Will you kindly tell me what you are driving at?"

"I can't. But look here, Page—which of us is going to write this story to the boss?"

"You are, and don't forget to put in those remarks of yours. They'll help some."

"Shouldn't I cable? Marten may want to know of this new move."

"Yes, I suppose that is the right thing to do. When you have coded the message, I'll go through it with you. There must be no mistake this time."

Thus, within a few hours, Hugh Marten, established at the Meurice in Paris, received news which certainly took him aback; for he was a man who seldom brooked a successful interloper. At first he was annoyed, and had it in mind to discharge Page by cablegram. There would be no difficulty in giving "Messrs. Power and MacGonigal" a good deal of legal trouble. To begin with, the lawyers would allege collusion against Page, and an investigation into the purchase of the ranch might reveal loopholes for legal stilettos. Indeed, his

alert brain was canvassing all manner of chicanery possible through statutes made and enacted when his wife came in, flushed and breathless.

"Hugh," she cried, "I've had heaps of fun this afternoon! Madame de Neuville brought me to the Duchesse de Brasnes' place in that quaint old Faubourg St. Germain, and the Duchesse took such a fancy to me that we are invited for a week-end shoot at her castle, one of the real châteaux on the Loire. You'll come, of course?"

"Why, yes, Nancy."

"You say yes as though I had asked you to go to the dentist."

"I'm a trifle worried, and that's the fact."

"What is it? Can I help?"

Marten hesitated; though only for an instant. His wife was more adorable than ever since she had discovered what wonders an illimitable purse could achieve in the *boutiques* of the Rue de la Paix; but there was ever at the back of his mind a suspicion that she looked on her past life as a thing that was dead, and was schooling herself to an artificial gaiety in these glittering surroundings of rank and fashion.

"The truth is that I am vexed at something which has happened in Colorado—at Bison," he said.

"You have had no ill news of Dad?" she cried, in quick alarm.

"No, he's all right. I told you he had sold the ranch. Well, the purchaser is that young engineer, Derry Power."

He watched her closely; but trust any woman to mislead a man when she knows that her slightest change

of expression will be marked and understood. Mrs. Marten's eyes opened wide, and she had no difficulty in feigning honest surprise.

"Derry Power!" she almost gasped. "What in the world does he want with the ranch?"

"It seems that he contrived to find the main vein which we lost in the Esperanza mine."

"Oh, is that it?" She was indifferent, almost bored. Her mind was in the valley of the Loire.

"Yes. That idiot Page was kept in the dark very neatly; so he sold the mill at a scrap price—by my instructions, I admit—and now Power and MacGonigal have everything in their own hands."

Nancy's eyebrows arched, and she laughed gleefully. "Just fancy Mac blossoming into a mining magnate!" she cried. "But why should this affair worry you, Hugh?"

His hard features softened into a smile—in this instance, a real smile—for he was intensely proud of his pretty wife.

"I hate to feel that I have got the worst of a deal," he admitted. "But that's all right, Nancy. We won't quarrel with old friends at Bison. Run away and write to your duchess while I concoct a cable."

And so it came to pass that Page, instead of receiving a curt dismissal, was told to place no obstacles in the way of the new venture, but rather to facilitate it by fixing a reasonable price on land and houses not covered by the sale of the mill, should they be needed by Marten's successors at Bison. In fact, by an unexampled display of good will on the part of his employer, he was bade to offer these properties to Power

at a valuation. That somewhat simple though generous proposal had a highly important sequel when Francis Willard, rendered furious by learning how he had been ousted from the ranch, sought legal aid to begin a suit against Power. Even his own lawyer counseled abandonment of the law when the facts were inquired into. Power's title was indisputable, and Marten's action in selling the mill, no less than his readiness to make over other portions of the real estate if desired, showed that the whole undertaking had been carried through in an open and businesslike way.

Willard was convinced against his will; but, being a narrow-minded and selfish man, who had not scrupled to imperil his daughter's happiness when a wealthy suitor promised to extricate him from financial troubles, the passive dislike he harbored against Power now became an active and vindictive hatred. He believed, perhaps he had honestly convinced himself of this, that the young engineer had secured the estate by a trick. It was not true, of course, because he had jumped at the chance of a sale when approached by the Denver lawyer acting for Power. But a soured and rancorous nature could not wholly stifle the prickings of remorse. He knew that he had forced his daughter into a loveless marriage; he could not forget the girl's wan despair when no answer came from Sacramento to her letters; he had experienced all the misery of a craven-hearted thief when he stole the letters Power sent to Bison until Marten assured him that equally effective measures at the other end had suppressed Nancy's correspondence also. Because these things were unforgivable he could not forgive the man against whom

they were planned. Penury and failing health had driven him to adopt the only sure means by which he could break off the tacit engagement which opposed a barrier to his scheming; but the knowledge that he had sinned was an ever-present torture. A certain order of mind, crabbed, ungenerous, self-seeking, may still be plagued by a lively conscience, and Willard's enmity against Power could be measured only by his own fiercely repressed sufferings.

"Curse the fellow!" he said bitterly, when the lawyer told him that a suit for recovery of the ranch must be dismissed ignominiously. "Curse him! Why did he cross my path? I am an old man, and I do not wish to distress my daughter, or I would go now to Bison and shoot him at sight!"

So John Darien Power had made at least one determined enemy, and it may be taken for granted that, had he visited the Dolores ranch instead of Denver on that first day in the open air after his accident, no money he could command would have made him undisputed lord of the land and all it contained.

But evil thinking is a weed that thrives in the most unlikely soil. To all appearance, with Nancy wed and the foundations of a fortune securely laid, Willard's animosity could achieve small harm to Power. Yet it remained vigorous throughout the years, and its roots spread far, so that when the opportunity came they entangled Power's feet, and he fell, and was nearly choked to death by them.

CHAPTER V

WHEREIN POWER TRAVELS EAST

One summer's day at high noon a man rode into Bison from the direction of the railway, and, judging by the critical yet interested glances he cast right and left while his drowsy mustang plodded through the dust, he seemed to be appraising recent developments keenly. As the horseman was Francis Willard, and as this was the first time he had visited Bison since leaving the ranch, there were many novelties to repay his scrutiny. The number of houses had been nearly doubled, the store had swollen proportionately, not to mention the Bison Hotel, which had sprung into being on the site of the ramshackle lean-to where once MacGonigal's patrons had stabled their "plugs," and a roomy omnibus rumbled to and fro in the main street before and after the departure of every train from the depot.

These unerring signs of prosperity spoke volumes; but it was only when the rider drew rein near the mouth of the Gulch that he was able to note the full measure of Bison's progress. Deep in a hollow to the left were two mills instead of one, and the noise of ore-crunching rolls was quadrupled in volume. Two long rows of recently erected cyanide vats betokened the increased output of the mine, and, even while Willard sat there, gazing moodily at a scene almost strange to his

vision, an engine snorted by, seemingly hauling a dozen loaded trucks, but in reality exerting its panting energy to restrain the heavily freighted cars from taking headlong charge of the downward passage. Another engine, heading a similar string of empty wagons, was evidently on the point of making the ascent; so Willard jogged an unwilling pony into movement again, and entered the Gulch.

Beyond the two sets of rails, nothing new caught his eye here until he had rounded the curve leading to the watershed. Then he came in sight of the original entrance to the mine—a shaft was being sunk nearly three-quarters of a mile away, but he was not aware of that at the moment—and noticed that a stout man, jauntily arrayed in a white canvas suit and brown boots, who had a cigar tucked into a corner of his mouth, had strolled out of a pretentious-looking office building, and was obviously surprised by the appearance of a mounted man in that place at that moment.

MacGonigal had, in fact, recognized Willard the instant he swung into view, because none of the ranchers rode that way nowadays, a more circuitous but safer trail having been cut to avoid the rails.

Mac had certainly remarked that he was dog-goned when he set eyes on Willard, and a similar sentiment was expressed more emphatically by the visitor; for there was no love lost between those two, and, in consequence, their greetings were unusually gracious.

"Wall, Mr. Willard, ef this don't beat cock-fightin'!" cried MacGonigal, when the other halted at the foot of an inclined way leading to the level space from which rock had been blasted to provide room

for the various structures that cluster near the outlet of a busy mine. "Now, who'd ha thought of seein' you hereabouts terday?"

"Or any other day, Mr. MacGonigal," said Willard, forcing an agreeable smile. The prefix to MacGonigal's name was a concession to all that had gone before during a short half-hour's ride. The ex-storekeeper was now the nominal head of a gold-producing industry which ranked high in the state, and the bitterness welling up in Willard's mind had been quelled momentarily by sheer astonishment.

"That's as may be," returned Mac affably, rolling the cigar across his mouth. "But, seein' as you air on this section of the map, guess you'd better bring that hoss o' yourn into the plaza. A bunch of cars is due here any minute."

Willard jogged nearer, and dismounted, and a youth summoned by MacGonigal took charge of the mustang.

"Hev' yer come ter see Power?" inquired the stout one, with just the right amount of friendly curiosity.

"Well, no, not exactly. I shall be glad to meet him, of course. Is he somewhere around?"

"No. He went East two days sence."

Now, the movements of local financial magnates are duly chronicled in the Colorado press, and MacGonigal was sure that Willard had not only read the announcement of Power's departure, but had timed this visit accordingly. Still, that was no affair of his. Willard was here, and might stay a month if he liked, because he would have to pay for bed and board in the Bison Hotel, which MacGonigal owned.

"Ah, that's too bad," said Willard, feigning an in-

difference he was far from feeling. "Still, I have no real business on hand. I happened to be at a loose end in Denver, and didn't seem to know anybody in the Brown Palace Hotel; so I came out here, to take a peep at the old shanty, so to speak."

"You'll hev' located an alteration or two already?" chuckled the other.

"Every yard of the way was a surprise."

"Guess that's so; but what you've seen is small potaters with the circus on the other side of the hill."

"On the ranch! Things can't have changed so greatly there?"

"You come this-a way, an' survey the park."

MacGonigal led the visitor through a check office, and along a corridor. Throwing open a door, he ushered him into a well furnished room, with two French windows opening on to a spacious veranda.

"This yer is Derry's den," he said. "He likes ter look at the grass growin'; but my crib is at the other side, whar I kin keep tab on the stuff that makes most other things grow as well. Not that it ain't dead easy ter know why Derry likes this end of the outfit—an' nobody livin' 'll understand that better'n yerself, Mr. Willard, when you've looked the proposition over fer ten seconds by the clock."

Willard had never found MacGonigal so loquacious in former days; but he was too preoccupied by the tokens of success that met his furtive gaze in every direction to give much heed to any marked change in his guide's manner. Moreover, he had scarcely set foot in the veranda before he yielded to a feeling which, at first, was one of undiluted amazement. The annual

rainfall had been normal since he abandoned ranching; but Colorado in June is not exactly the home of lush meadows during the best of years, and he was staring now at a fertile panorama of green pastures, and thriving orchards, while the ranch itself was set in the midst of smooth lawns embosomed in a wealth of shrubs and ornamental trees. Greatest miracle of all, a tiny stream of pellucid water was flowing down the Gulch.

"I don't quite grasp this," he muttered thickly, while his eyes roved almost wildly from the dancing rivulet to the fair savannah which it had made possible.

"A bit of a wonder, ain't it?" gurgled MacGonigal placidly. "Jest another piece of luck, that's what it air. Derry can't go wrong, I keep tellin' him. I had a notion the hull blamed show was busted when we struck a spring at the end o' the fust dip of two hundred feet; but Derry jest laughed in his quiet way, an' said, 'There oughter be tears round about any place called Grief, an' now we have Dolores weepin'. We've tapped a perennial spring, Mac, an' it's the very thing I wanted ter make the ranch a fair copy of Paradise.' There you hev' it—Derry's luck—a pipe line laid on by Nature—an' him raisin' apples, Mr. Willard, raisin' pippins as big as your fist, on land whar *you* couldn't raise a bundle of alfalfa!"

Willard had to find something to say, or he would have choked with spleen. "Evidently the inrush of water did not injure the mine?" he blurted out; but, for the life of him, he could not conceal the envy in his voice.

"Did good, really," chortled MacGonigal. "We had to drive a new adit, an' that cleared away enough rock ter give us elbow-room. The fust intake was up thar,"

and he pointed to that part of the Gulch where Power had once wrought with death on a long-vanished ledge. "Now we go in about a hundred feet west of this yer veranda, an' the haulin' is easier."

"Mr. Power and you have created a marvelous property here," said Willard after a long pause.

"Not me," said MacGonigal quickly. "I helped Derry with my wad; but he did all the thinkin', an' it's like a fresh chapter outer a fairy tale when I wake up every fine mornin' an' remember that my third share is bringin' me in close on five hundred dollars a day."

"So Power's interest is worth three hundred thousand dollars a year?"

"More'n that, I reckon. The output keeps on pilin' up, an' Derry's horses 'll add a tidy bit to his bank balance this year."

"His horses?"

"Yep. Hain't you heerd? One-thumb Jake is manager of the plug department. Nigh on fifty two-year-olds 'll be sold this fall at two hundred dollars an' more a throw. I suspicioned Derry was goin' crazy when he bought up so many mares; but I allow he has the bulge on me now. An' Jake! Dang me if he didn't show up at a dance t'other evenin' with a silver fringe on his chaps!"

Willard turned reluctantly into the darkened room, and, by some mischance, when his eyes had recovered from the external glare, the first object they dwelt on was a framed pencil sketch of the Dolores homestead as he had last seen it—a dreary, ramshackle place, arid and poverty-stricken. In the corner was written, "Nancy," and a date.

"The ways of fortune are mysterious," he said, making shift to utter the words calmly. "I endured ten long years of financial loss in the house which my daughter has shown there. She used to know Mr. Power, and gave the drawing to him, I suppose."

"Derry thinks a heap of that picter," commented MacGonigal.

"I wonder why?"

"He never tole me."

Willard laughed disagreeably. He had not forgotten Mac's peculiarities, one of which used to be blank ignorance concerning any subject on which he did not wish to be drawn.

"By the way," he said, "why did you give the new mine such a queer name—El Preço—I guess you know it means, 'The Price'? Why was it called that?"

"It was jest a notion of Derry's."

"Rather odd, wasn't it?"

"Derry's mostly odd, size him up anyways you hev' a mind ter."

"I could have understood it better had he christened the place, 'The Bargain.' He shook me up good and hard when he grabbed Dolores for five thousand dollars."

"He sure had his wits about him, had Derry," said MacGonigal admiringly.

"And he has gone now to New York, you tell me," went on Willard.

"East, I said."

"Well, East stands for New York all the time. Is he making a long stay there?"

"He never said a word. Jest, 'So long, Mack,' an', 'So long, Derry.' That's all thar was to it. Kin I get you a drink? Thar's a chunk of ice somewhar in the outfit."

"No, thanks. Time I got a move on. How about those freight cars of yours? Have I a clear road back through the Gulch?"

"Thar's a half-hour's off spell right now," was the prompt answer, and a minute later the resident manager of El Preço mine was watching Willard descend the canyon in the direction of Bison.

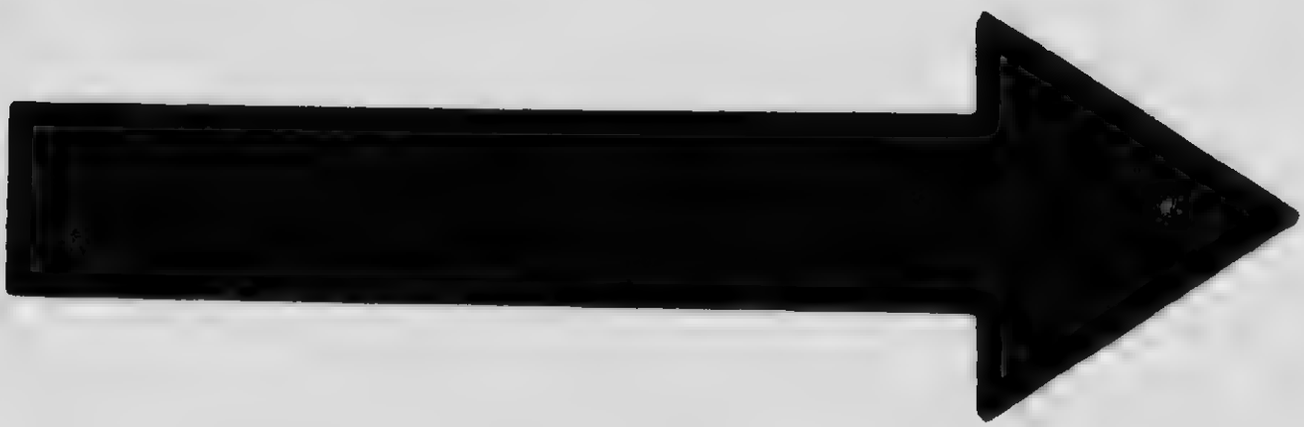
"I'd give a ten-spot ter know jest why that skunk kem nosin' round here," he mused, gazing contemplatively after the slow-moving mustang and its rider. Then he called the youth who had held the horse during Willard's brief visit.

"What sort of an Indian air you, Billy?" he grinned.

"Purty spry, Boss, when the trail's fresh," said the boy.

"Well, hike after old man Willard, an' let me know when he's safe off this yer section."

Within a couple of hours Billy reported that Willard had entered a train bound for Denver, and MacGonigal blew a big breath of relief. It was not that he had the slightest misgiving as to the effect of Willard's ill will against either his partner or himself, but he was intensely anxious that Power should not come in contact with anyone who would remind him of the existence of Mrs. Hugh Marten. Power himself never mentioned her; so his faithful friend and trusted associate in business could only hope that the passing years, with their multiplicity of fresh interests, were gradu-



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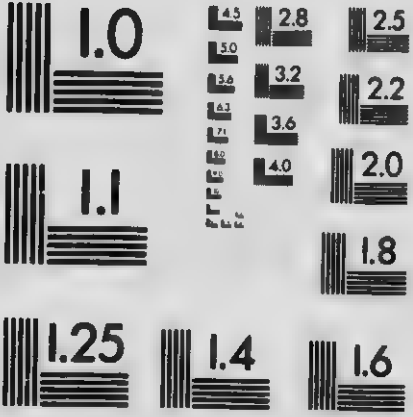

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ally dimming the memory of events which had altered the whole course of his life.

MacGonigal did not think it necessary to tell Willard that Power had brought his mother from San Francisco soon after the mine proved its worth. Mother and son occupied the Dolores ranch. The presence of the gentle, white-haired woman was a positive blessing to Bison; for she contrived to divert no mean percentage of her son's big income into channels of social and philanthropic effort in which she took a close personal interest. A library and reading-room had been established; a technical instruction class offered an excellent supplement to the state school; a swimming bath was built close to the mills; two churches were in course of erection; a wideawake theatrical manager at Denver had secured a site for a theater and the township already boasted its ten miles of metaled roadway. In the self-satisfied phrase of the inhabitants, Bison was becoming "quite a place," and everyone testified that it was to Mrs. Power rather than her son that all these civic improvements were due. Men had even ceased to consult Power himself on such matters.

"You run and see my mother about that," he would say, with a quiet smile, when someone had endeavored to arouse his sympathy in behalf of a deserving object. "It's my affair to make the money which she spends. Get her to O. K. your scheme, and it goes."

In business he was equally unapproachable.

"Put it before MacGonigal," was his regular formula. "I can't do a thing without his say-so. But I warn you he is a terror. If there's a kink in your

proposition, he'll find it, as sure as Jake can run his fingers onto a splint."

For all that, the stout manager of mine and mill realized his limitations.

Once, and once only, did MacGonigal act in the belief that Power had referred a point to him for final settlement. A glib agent for mining machinery persuaded him to purchase a new type of drill, which proved absolutely useless when asked to disintegrate the hard granite of Colorado. Power laughed when he heard of its failure.

"You must have thought it was meant for cutting cheese, Mac," he said lightly. But the barbed shaft struck home, and "the terror" bought no more drills without first consulting the man who understood them.

Thus, slowly but effectually, Power contrived to isolate himself from Bison. With an almost uncanny prescience he gave occasional directions in the mine, or suggested some modification in the milling process which invariably resulted in a higher percentage of extraction. For the rest, he devoted his days to the improvement of the stud farm, and his evenings to books. His mother tried vainly to dissipate this recluse trend of thought and habit. On one memorable occasion she invited a friend and her two cheerful and good-looking daughters to visit the ranch for a week. Timidly enough, she had sprung a surprise on her son, warning him of the forthcoming invasion only when it was too late to stop travelers already en route from San Francisco. Then she, like MacGonigal, had to learn her lesson. Derry agreed she had acted quite rightly. He merely expressed a suave doubt that the ladies would

enjoy the enforced seclusion of a place like Dolores, but they might appreciate the air. Then he strolled out, and a telegram from Denver apologized for a sudden departure to Chicago. He explained in a letter that he was in need of a number of books, and thought it best to look through the bookstores in person rather than trust to catalogues. He returned two days after the guests had left, and there were no more experiments in that direction. Be sure that an anxious mother had long ago formed a remarkably accurate opinion as to the circumstances attending Nancy Willard's wedding; but, being a wise woman, she said no word to her son concerning it, and was content to pray that the cloud might lift from off his soul, and that he might yet meet a girl who would make him a good and loving wife. For that is the way of women who are mothers —they find real joy only in the well-being of their offspring. Though this gentle-hearted creature knew that she was risking some of her own belated happiness in bringing about her son's marriage, she was ready to dare that, and more, for his sake. She longed to renew her own youth in fondling his children. She was almost feverishly desirous of seeing him thoroughly established in a bright and cheerful home before the gathering mists shut him out forever from her sight. So she waited, and watched, and wondered what the future had in store for her loved one, and often, in her musings, she tried to imagine what manner of girl Nancy Willard was that she should have inspired such an enduring and hopeless passion.

The upheaval, when it came, was due to the simplest of causes. Power had foreseen the tremendous

industrial development which lay before Colorado, and indulged his horse-breeding hobby on lines calculated to produce a large income wholly apart from the ever-increasing profits of the mine. The state needed horses, which must be strong of bone, with plenty of lung capacity; yet not too heavy, for mountain tracks and dusty valleys are anathema to the soft Belgian. They must be presentable animals, too, symmetrical, of untarnished lineage, and of a type fitted either for saddle or harness, because Colorado was making money in a hurry. Thus, it chanced that, shortly before Willard's ill-omened visit to Bison, an Eastern agent wrote advising Power to attend a sale in New York. A noted breeder of hackneys, who had imported some of the best sires from England and Russia, and owned several fine Percherons, was breaking up his stud, and the chance thus presented of securing some magnificent stock might not be repeated during another decade.

Power asked his mother to accompany him; but she was afraid of the long journey in the torrid temperature then obtaining. Yielding to his wishes, she telegraphed a second time to her San Francisco friends, and they accepted an invitation joyously and promptly. Moreover, seeing that she was regarding with some misgivings his prospective absence from the ranch for a period which could not well be less than three weeks, he made a great concession.

"If Mrs. Moore and her girls can arrange to stay so long, keep them here until I return," he said, and the pleasure in the worn, lined face fully repaid the effort those words cost him. So they kissed, and parted, and the weary years which have passed since that sun-

lit morning in Colorado have contained no diviner solace for the man than the knowledge that he left his mother well satisfied with her lot, and smiling a farewell without the slightest premonition of evil or sorrow. It is well to part thus from those whom we love; for no man knows what the future may have in store—and horror would have been added to the burden of Power's suffering if recollections of the last hours of companionship with his mother were clouded by an abiding sense of unkindness or unfilial treatment.

So Power hied him to New York, which meant that he passed three hot nights and two hotter days in a fast-speeding train. The Rock Island Railroad took him across the rolling prairie to Omaha and Chicago, and, in the city which no steer nor sheep nor hog can visit and live, he entered the palatial Pennsylvania Limited, which, in those unregenerate days, dumped him out early in the morning on the New Jersey shore. Then, for the first time, he saw New York, and saw it from the river, which is the one way to see New York for the first time. Crossing by the ferry to 23d Street, he did not, it is true, secure that wondrous initial glimpse of a city, unequaled, in many respects, by any other, which is vouchsafed to the traveler arriving by sea. But, even twenty-two years ago, the busy Hudson was no mean stream, and when Power's unaccustomed eye turned bewildered from the maze of shipping which thronged that magnificent waterway it found fresh wonders in the far-flung panorama stretching from Grant's Tomb to the Battery. At that time Trinity Church was still a landmark, for New York had hardly begun to climb into the empyrean; so the

prospect was pleasing rather than stupefying, as it is today.

A hot wind already hissed with furnace-breath over the fourteen miles of serried streets that lined the opposite shore; for, in the long years which have sped since Power first crossed the Hudson, New York has neither lengthened nor broadened. Even mighty Gotham cannot achieve the impossible; so, in the interim, several new cities have been superimposed on the older one which spread its beauties before his bewildered vision. The *Paris*—who of the middle generation does not remember the *Paris*, with her invariable list to starboard, after an ocean crossing?—was creeping slowly upstream, and Power was amused by the discovery that the big ship, like himself, moved with a limp. The *City of Rome*, whose yacht-like lines suggested the poetry of motion, but, as is the mode on Parnassus, adhered strictly to suggestion, lay at anchor near the Jersey shore, and when the ferry churned around her graceful stem, the grim walls of the Palisades completed a picture which admits of few peers. Disillusionment came later; but the spell of that thrilling first impression was never wholly lost. Driving through 23d Street, on his way to the Waldorf Hotel, Power could not help comparing this important thoroughfare with Market Street, San Francisco, and State Street, Chicago, and the architectural stock of the metropolis experienced a sudden slump. Nor did it wholly recover lost points when his carriage entered Madison Square, with its newly erected campanile, almost a replica of the stately Giralda tower in Seville, its glimpses of Broadway, south and north, its stolid Fifth Avenue Hotel, and its

chastely elegant, though still towerless, white Metropolitan building. Even the Waldorf, then less than a fourth of the Waldorf-Astoria, though notable already among the public palaces of the world, failed to strike his imagination with the appeal of the Palace Hotel, San Francisco; the truth being that New York, first in the field by a couple of centuries, had not yet begun, like Milton's eagle, to mew her mighty youth.

It would assuredly be interesting to those who knew and loved the queen city of the Atlantic nearly a quarter of a century ago if Power's revised and corrected opinions might be quoted now. But the chronicle of a man's life ought to be accurate before it is picturesque, and the truth is that the heat-wave which was then withering the whole Eastern seaboard kept this visitor from breezy Colorado pent within the marble halls of the Waldorf Hotel, save when urgent need drove him forth. That particular scourge of high temperature was destined to become historical. The thermometer soared up beyond 100 degrees Fahrenheit; hundreds of people were stricken daily by heat apoplexy; the hospitals were crammed to their utmost capacity; the asphalt pavement, where it existed, showed ruts like a muddy road in the country; and it is easy to understand why a man who had cheerfully endured 110 degrees and 115 degrees in the dry heat of the nearer Rockies should gasp for air here like a fish out of water.

Worst of all, the horse sale was postponed. The owner of the stud and his prospective patrons alike had flown to sea and mountain for relief. As inquiry showed that the horse-breeder himself had gone to Newport, Power made haste to secure a stateroom on one

of the Fall River line of steamboats, and it was on this quest that the *Puritan Maiden*, a vessel on which folk would travel merely for the sake of describing her to their friends, brought him to the chief summer resort of fashionable life in America.

He had not the slightest notion that Mrs. Hugh Marten was disporting herself daily on that particular stretch of Rhode Island beach. For all that he knew, she might as well have been at Trouville or Brighton. Indeed, had anyone dared the lightning of his glance by mentioning her, and if he were compelled to hazard a guess as to her possible whereabouts, he would certainly have said that, to the best of his belief, she was in Europe. Such was the fact; but there are facts in every life which assume the guise of sheer incredibility when analyzed, say, in the doubtful atmosphere of a law-court. In the dark days to come, during those silent watches of the night when a man looks back along the tortuous ways of the past, John Darien Power could only lift impotent hands to Heaven and plead in anguish that he might at least have been spared an ordeal which he not only did not seek, but would have fled to the uttermost parts of the earth to have avoided. Such moments of introspection were few and far between, it is true. His was too self-contained a nature that he should rail against the Omnipotent for having tested him beyond endurance. He made a great fight, and he failed, and he paid an indemnity which is not to be measured by any other scale than that alone which records the noblest effort.

To his own thinking, the tragedy of his life began that day in Bison when the sympathetic storekeeper told

him of Nancy Willard's marriage. But he was wrong in that belief. A man may lose the woman he loves, and recover from the blow, but he peers into abysmal depths when he meets her as another man's wife, and finds that love, though sorely wounded, is not dead. It is then that certain major fiends, unknown to the generality, come forth from their lairs—and there must have been a rare awakening of crafty ghouls on the day Power reached Newport.

CHAPTER VI

THE MEETING

WHEN Power arrived at New England's chief summer resort on a glorious July morning twenty-two years ago, man had succeeded in adding only a garish fringe to a quietly beautiful robe devised by Nature. Some few pretentious houses had been built; but local residences in the mass made up an architectural hotchpotch utterly at variance with sylvan solitudes and breezy cliffs. Rhode Island, which lends its name to the entire state, is slightly larger than Manhattan. A long southwesterly spur shields from the mighty rages of the Atlantic the little bay on which the old town of Newport stands; but the climate has the bracing freshness which is almost invariably associated with the northern half of that great ocean. If the bare rudiments of artistry existed among the idle rich who overran the island during the '80's, it should have protected a charming blend of seashore and grassy downs from the Italian palaces, Rhenish castles, Swiss chalets, and donjon keeps which the freakish conceits of plutocrats placed cheek by jowl along the coast. Nowadays these excrescences are either swallowed in forests of well grown trees or have become so beautified by creepers that they have lost much of their bizarre effect; while magnificent avenues, carefully laid out and well shaded, run through a new city of delightful villas and resplendent gar-

dens. But Power's first stroll from the portals of the Ocean House revealed a medley in which bad taste ran riot. The Casino, a miserable-looking structure, was saved from dismal mediocrity by its splendid lawns alone; the surf-bathers' friends were protected from the fierce sun by a long, low shanty built of rough planks; the roads were unkempt, and ankle-deep in mud or dust; broken-down shacks alternated with mansions; a white marble replica of some old Florentine house, stuck bleakly on one knob of a promontory, was scowled at by a heavy-jowled fortress cumbering its neighbor.

He found these things irritating. They were less in harmony with their environment than the corrugated iron roofs of Bison. His gorge rose at them. They satisfied no esthetic sense. In a word, he resolved to get through his business with the horse-fancying judge as speedily as might be, and escape to the unspoiled wilderness of Maine.

Were it not for one of those minor accidents which at times can exert such irresistible influence on the course of future events, he would certainly have left Newport without ever being aware of Mrs. Marten's presence there. He ascertained that the judge had gone off early in the morning on a yachting excursion up Narragansett Bay, having arranged to lunch at a friend's house at Pawtucket; so, perforce, he had to wait in Newport another day

At dinner he was allotted a seat at a large round table reserved for unattached males like himself. The company was a curiously mixed one, but pleasant withal. A Norwegian from San Francisco, who sold Japanese curios, a globe-trotting Briton, a Southerner from

Alabama, a man from Plainville, New Jersey, and a Mexican who spoke no English, made up, with Power himself, a genuinely cosmopolitan board, and Power soon discovered that he was the only person present who could understand the Mexican. Mere politeness insisted that he should lend his aid as interpreter when a negro waiter asked the olive-skinned señor what he would like to eat; but the "Greaser," as he was dubbed instantly, proved to be a jovial soul, who laugh ' when any of the other men laughed, insisted on having the joke translated, and roared again when it was explained to him, so that each quip earned a double recognition, while he never failed to pay his own score by some joyous anecdote or amusing repartee. Thus, Power was forced into the role of "good fellow" in a way which he would not have believed possible a few hours earlier. In spite of himself, the merry mood of other years came uppermost, and, when the party broke up at midnight, after a long and lively sitting on a moonlit veranda, he retired to his room with a certain feeling of marvel and agreeable surprise at the change which one evening of enforced relaxation had effected in his outlook on life. He decided that these chance companions had done him a world of good, that his misanthropic attitude was a false one, and that a week or two at Newport might send him back to Colorado a better man. Applying to a state of mind a metaphor drawn from material things, he felt as an Englishman feels who leaves his own dripping and fog-bound island on a January afternoon and wakes next morning amid the roses and sunshine of the Riviera. The glitter on land and sea may bear a close resemblance to spangles

and gilt paper on the stage; but it is cheering to eyes which have not seen the sun for weeks, and when, in such conditions, John Bull sits down to luncheon under the awnings of a café facing the blue Mediterranean, he is unquestionably quite a different being from the muffled-up person who hurried on board the steamer at Dover.

Power had contrived to withdraw himself so completely from the more genial side of existence at Bison that he rediscovered it with a fresh zest. Next day he was no longer alone. The man from Birmingham, Alabama, and the Englishman shared his love of horses, and the three visited the judge, who stabled some of his cattle on the island, and had photographs and pedigrees galore wherewith to describe the stock on his New York farm.

So Power stayed two days, and yet a third, and he was laughing with the rest at some quaint bit of Spanish humor which he had translated for the benefit of the company at dinner on the third evening, when he became aware that a lady, entering with a large party, for whose use a table had been specially decorated, was standing stock-still and looking at him. He lifted his eyes, and met the astonished gaze of Mrs. Marten.

"Derry!" she gasped.

"Nancy!" said he, wholly off his guard, and flushing violently in an absurd consciousness of having committed some fault. She had caught him, as it were, in a boisterous moment utterly at variance with the three years of self-imposed monasticism which followed her marriage. Yet, with the speed of thought, he saw

the futility of such reasoning. The girl-wife knew nothing of his sufferings. She was greeting him with all the warmth of undiminished friendship, and could not possibly understand that he had endured tortures for her sake. So he regained his wits almost at once, and was on his feet, bowing.

"I beg your pardon, Mrs. Marten," he went on. "Your presence here took me completely unawares. You are the last person breathing I expected to see in Newport."

She laughed delightedly, with no hint of flurry or confusion beyond that first natural outburst.

"It would sound much nicer if you said what I am going to say to you," she cried, "that you are one of the few persons breathing whom I am really delighted to see in Newport. But I can't stop and talk now. I'll ask Mrs. Van Ralten to forgive me if I slip away from her party for ten minutes after dinner. Mind, you wait for me on the veranda. I'm simply dying to hear some news of dear old Bison! How is Mac? Oh, my! I really must go. But don't you dare escape afterward!"

Forgetful of all else, he allowed his startled eyes to follow her as she ran to her place at the neighboring table. She was dressed in some confection of white tulle and silver; a circlet of diamonds sparkled in her thick brown hair; a big ruby formed a clasp in front for an aigrette of osprey plumes; her robes and bearing were those of a princess. Were it not for the warranty of his senses, he would never have pictured the girl of the Dolores ranch in this fine lady. Even now he stood as one in a trance, half incredulous

of the evidence of eyes and ears, and seemingly afraid lest he might awake and come back to the commonplaces of an existence in which the Nancy Willard of his dreams had no part.

The Englishman, Dacre by name, knew something of the world and its denizens, and he had seen the blood rush to his friend's face and ebb away again until the brown skin was sallow.

"Sit down, old chap," he said quietly. "I was just thinking of ordering some wine for the public benefit. Do you drink fizz?"

The calm voice helped to restore Power's bemused senses. Afraid lest his moonstruck attitude might have been observed by some of Mrs. Marten's companions, he tried to cover his confusion by a jest.

"Wine, did you say?" he cried. "Certainly—let's have a magnum. Bottled sunlight should help to dissipate visions."

"Anacreon has something to that effect in one of his odes; though he vowed that he worshiped Wine, Woman, and the Muses in equal measure."

"Who is Anacreon?" asked the man from Plainville.

"He flourished at Athens about 600 B.C.," laughed Dacre.

"Did he? By gosh! The Greeks knew a bit, then, even at that time."

"This one in particular was an authority on those three topics. Love, to him, was no mischievous boy armed with silver darts, but a giant who struck with a smith's hammer. He died like a gentleman, too, being choked by a grapestone at the age of eighty-five."

"Ah, that explains it!"

"Explains what?"

"He had a small swallow, or rum and romance would have knocked him out in half the time."

Power was rapidly becoming himself again. "I behaved like a stupid boy just now," he said; "but I was never more taken aback in my life. I have not met Mrs. Marten since her marriage, three years ago, and I imagined she was in Europe."

"Oh, is that Mrs. Marten?" chimed in downright Plainville. "Last Sunday's papers whooped her up as the prize beauty of Newport this summer, and I guess they got nearer the truth than usual. She's a sure winner."

"Did I hear her mention Mrs. Van Ralten?" inquired Dacre.

"Yes, her hostess tonight, I believe."

"Van Ralten and Marten hurried off together to the Caspian last week. They are interested in the oil wells at Baku."

Cymbals seemed to clash in Power's brain, and he heard his own voice saying in a subdued and colorless staccato, "I am sorry I did not meet her sooner. I leave tomorrow."

Dacre looked at him curiously; but the wine had arrived, a choice vintage of the middle '70's, and the Mexican was lifting his glass.

"*El sabio muda conseja; el necio no,*" he quoted.

The phrase was so apt that Power glanced at the speaker with marked doubt; whereupon the blond Norwegian asked what the señor had said.

"He told us that the wise man changes his mind, but the fool does not," translated Power.

"Gee whizz!" cried Plainville. "It's a pity he can't give out the text in good American; for he talks horse sense most all the time. If *I* had a peach like Mrs. Marten callin' me 'Derry,' damn if I'd quit for a month!"

The general laugh at this dry comment evoked a demand by the Mexican for a Spanish version of the joke. Then he made it clear that he had resolved to abjure wine, and was only salving his conscience by a proverb.

This cheerful badinage, which might pass among any gathering of men when one of them happened to be greeted by a pretty woman, did not leave Power unscathed. He had dwelt too long apart from his fellows not to wince at allusions which would glance harmlessly off less sensitive skins. The iron which had entered into his soul was fused to a white heat by sight of the woman he had loved and lost. He resented what he imagined as being the knowledge these boon companions boasted of his parlous state. Unable to join in their banter, not daring to trust his voice in the most obvious of retorts, for the man from Plainville had not been designed by nature to pose as a squire of dames, he gulped down a glass of champagne at a draft, and pretended to make up for wasted time in an interrupted course.

Dacre seemed to think that he would be interested in the latest gossip in financial circles with reference to a supposed scheme organized by Marten and Van Ralten to fight the Oil Trust. Power listened in si-

lence until he felt sure of himself; then he launched out vigorously.

"It strikes me that America has lost the art of producing great men," he said. "We whites are degenerating into mere money-grubbers; so, by the law of compensation, our next demigod should be a nigger."

"Huh!" snorted Alabama, eager for battle.

"That's my serious opinion," continued Power dogmatically. "And, what's more, I think I know the nigger. Have any of you dined in the Auditorium Hotel, Chicago?"

Yes, several; dining-room on top floor; lightning elevator; all right going up empty, but coming down full was rather a trial.

"Well, you will remember that, as you go in, a young colored gentleman takes your hat and overcoat, and cane or umbrella. He supplies no numbered voucher, and cannot possibly tell at which tables some six or seven hundred diners will be seated. At this time of year every man is wearing a straw hat of similar design; yet, as each guest comes forth, he is handed his own hat and other belongings. Now, I hold that that nigger has a brain of supreme mathematical excellence. There is not a financier in Wall Street who could begin to emulate that feat of memory. Given a chance, and such men make their own opportunities. The Auditorium cloakroom attendant will rise to a dizzy height."

"Tosh!" exclaimed Alabama, primed with facts to prove that hundreds of negroes could perform similar tricks, but were no good for anything else.

He was no match for Power in an argument where

figures held a place, and Dacre was the only other man present who realized that the talk had been boldly and skilfully wrenched to an impersonal topic. He, at any rate, made no further allusion to Marten or his projects; though he continued to watch Power narrowly but unobtrusively. Himself something of a derelict, though his aimless path lay in summer seas, he had conceived a warm regard for the quiet-mannered stranger from Colorado. Neither he nor any of the others knew aught of Power's history, who might really be the rancher he professed to be, though his student's features and reserved manner did not bear out the assumption. Later, when Dacre was better informed, he realized the cause of his first skepticism, for the engineer belonged to one of those rarer types of mankind who, like the lawyer, the soldier, the physician, and the clergyman, had the seal of his life's work stamped plainly upon him.

Hence, it followed that in a spirit of sheer comradeship and sympathy he kept an eye on Power during the next few days. He saw how matters were tending, and risked a rebuff in offering a friendly hint when disaster was imminent. Above all—whether for good or evil who can judge? at any rate, the writer of this record of a man's life feels least qualified to decide the point—he brought a dominating influence to bear at a moment when Power was adrift in a maelstrom which threatened to engulf him.

Yet there was slight sign of impending tempest in that bright room with its groups of diners seemingly well content with their surroundings. From the adjoining table, which Power could not see owing to the

position he occupied, came gusts of animated conversation. Mrs. Van Ralten rejoiced in the loud, penetrating accents of the Middle West, and snatches of her talk were audible.

"I do think James Gordon might have provided a more stylish Casino while he was about it."

"Yes, I sail on the *Teutonic* first week in August. Nothing will keep Willie away from the moors on the Twelfth."

"Did I see them? My dear, who could miss them? Has anyone ever met such freaks outside a dime museum?"

"Why, Nancy, I don't wonder a little bit that you were such a success in Paris. The nice things I was told about you turned me green with envy."

Alabama hotly contested each milestone of the Mason and Dixon Line; but Dacre believed that Power was less intent on the color problem than on catching each syllable of a sweet voice seldom heard above the clatter of tongues at the next table. At last the meal was ended, and the men strolled out into the veranda. Mrs. Marten seemed to know when her friend had risen; she turned and waved a hand, and obviously explained her action in the next breath. Soon she appeared, a radiant being fully in keeping with moonlight and a garden of exotics.

"Mary Van Ralten is a duck," she said joyously, when Power hurried forward. "She has given me half an hour; but I mustn't be a minute later, as she has turned out of her own house to accommodate the Barnstormers from Boston, who are acting for her guests tonight. All Newport will be there. You are coming,

Derry. I asked her, and will introduce you afterward. My carriage will wait. But, gracious me, why are you lame?"

He was leading her to a couple of reserved chairs in a palm-shaded nook, and she noticed that he walked with a limp.

"Happened an accident near the mine quite a time since," he said.

"I never heard. I wonder my father didn't mention it. Anyhow, Derry, why have you never written?"

"Listen to the pot calling the kettle, or, if that is only a trite simile, listen to the Fairy Queen berating a poor mortal for her own lapses!"

"Ah, I have not written since my marriage, it is true, but you treated my hapless missives so cavalierly when I did send them that I hardly dared risk another rebuff."

"What do you mean?" he asked thickly. He was priding himself on the ease with which they were establishing new relations, when this unlooked-for development plunged him again into a swift-running current of doubt and foreboding. They were seated now, not side by side as he had planned, but in such wise that Nancy could see his face clearly, she having deliberately pulled her chair round for that purpose.

"Exactly what I have said," she answered composedly. "I sent three separate letters to Mr. John Darien Power, the Esperanza Placer Mine, Sacramento —I shan't forget the address in a hurry, because I've always longed to ask why you were so ready to desert a friend—and, seeing that not one of them was re-

turned by the postoffice, I had good reason to sup, ose that they reached you all right. Derry, don't tell me you never got them!"

His heart seemed to miss a beat or two. In an instant he guessed the truth, that their correspondence had been burked by malicious contriving; but all he could find to say was:

"Did you really write to me?"

"Of course, I did. Am I not telling you? And you, Derry, did *you* write to *me*?"

His tongue alm ıst cleaved to the roof of his mouth; for he knew, in that instant, that they were not seated in the comfortable veranda of the Ocean House, but standing side by side on the lip of an abyss.

He must not, he dared not, answer truly. He had no right to make wreck and ruin of this bright young life, and none knew so well as he how proudly she would denounce the thievish wiles which had separated them if once she grasped their full import.

"It is so long ago," he muttered brokenly. "So many things have occurred since. I have forgotten. I—I can only be sure that I received no letters from you."

"You have forgotten!" she repeated slowly.

"Yes—that is, I suffered a good deal from a broken leg—it was badly set—that is why I have such a noticeable hobble. Events round about that period are all jumbled up in my mind."

The explanation was lame as his leg. It would never have deceived even the Nancy Willard of bygone years, and was utterly thrown away on this wide-eyed woman. She was conscious of a fierce pain somewhere in the

region of her heart, and wanted to cry aloud in her distress; but she crushed the impulse with a self-restraint that had become second nature, and bent nearer, smiling wanly.

"Why did you throw away your cigar, Derry?" she said. "Please smoke. Like every other man, you will talk more easily then. And do tell me what has been going on at Bison. I have often asked Hugh for news; but he says he never hears a word about the place since he sold his interests there."

Power hardly realized how swiftly and certainly she had made smooth the way. He was conscious only of a vast relief that the subject of the missing correspondence was dropped. Only in later hours of quiet reflection did he grasp the reason—that she was bitterly aware of the truth, and the whole truth. He began at once to describe developments on the ranch, and was too wishful to hide his own confusion behind the smoke of a cigar to notice how a white-gloved hand clenched the arm of a chair when he spoke of his mother and the place she filled in public esteem. Unconsciously he was telling Nancy just what she wanted to know. He was not married. There was no other woman! She uttered no sound; but her lower lip bore a series of white marks for a little while.

"You see," he explained glibly, "I acquired the habit of letting other people work when I was laid by for repairs. Please excuse these frequent references to a broken limb, which seems to figure in my talk much as King Charles's head in Mr. Dick's disjointed manuscripts. Anyhow, I had plenty of time for reading, as the mine paid from the very beginning, and a rock

spring which nearly scared Mac stiff came in handy to irrigate the upper part of the ranch—that long slope just below the Gulch, you remember."

"Yes, I remember," she said.

"Well, what between fruit-growing and horse-breeding, I hardly ever have time to go near Bison. My mother drives in every day over the new trail——"

"What new trail?"

"We had to cut a road across the divide. The Gulch is blocked by rails."

"Why?"

"That is where the mine is, you know."

"I don't know. Whereabouts exactly is the mine?"

"It starts in the west side of the canyon, about a hundred yards from the ranch end."

"Near a narrow cleft, topped by a sloping ledge?"

"Yes. How well you recollect every yard of the ground!"

"How did you come to locate the lost seam there?"

"By sheer chance. Some pieces of the granite wall fell away, and any miner who had been a week at his trade would have recognized the vein then."

"When did they fall away—the bits of rock, I mean?"

"It must have been about the time you—you were married, Mrs. Marten."

She tapped a satin-shod foot emphatically on the boarded floor. "Why are you calling me 'Mrs. Marten'?" she demanded.

"Well——"

"Don't do it again. I am 'Nancy' to you, Derry.

I refuse to part with the privileges of friendship in that casual way. But I want to understand things more closely. What caused the stones to fall?"

"I don't mind telling," he said, "though a good many people have asked me the history of El Preço, and I have refused hitherto to gratify their curiosity——"

"El Preço—does 't that mean 'the price'?"

"Yes."

"What an extraordinary name! The price of what?"

"Of my broken leg. There, you see! King Charles's head once more."

She paused, ever so briefly, before resuming her questioning. "Now, why did the stones fall?"

"Because an excited cowboy fired his revolver in the air, and the bullets struck a section of rock which required some such shock to dislodge it."

"But how did that affect you?"

"I happened to be lying on the very ledge you spoke of, and—oh, dash it all! I secured my limp then and there."

"Did the fall disturb a rattlesnake?"

"It may have disturbed a dozen rattlesnakes, for all that I can tell. But what an extraordinary thing to say! Did you know that a rattler lived in that cleft?"

"No. I was just thinking of the Gulch and its inhabitants. Perhaps my wits were wandering. . . . Come, Derry. Our half-hour is not gone, but we can talk on the way. Send a boy for my carriage. Do you want your hat and coat?"

She rose suddenly, and drew a light wrap of silvery

tissue around her shoulders. Power stood up, and faced her. He had never seen her looking so ethereally beautiful, not even on the night, now so long ago, when he parted from her before taking that disastrous journey to Sacramento.

"Do you really think I ought to come with you to Mrs. Van Ralten's?" he said.

"Of course. Why not? You are invited."

"But——"

"You are my big brother from Bison, Derry, and I'm not going to forgo the pleasure of your company if all Newport lined the road and bawled, 'Send him away!' But do hurry. Mary Van Ralten will forgive everything except unpunctuality."

The nebulous protest on Power's lips faded into silence. "On such a night I can dispense with hat and overcoat," he said. "Your carriage is a closed landau, I suppose?"

"Yes. After the play you can escort me to the Breakers—that is the name of the house we have rented—and Sam, our coachman, will take you home. . . . Oh, there he is, waiting. Mrs. Van Ralten's, Sam."

"Yes, Ma'am," said the negro, who had brought a carriage and pair to the doorway when he caught sight of his mistress. A negro footman opened the door, and Nancy entered, the brilliant moonlight gleaming for an instant on the sheen of a white silk stocking. Power seated himself by her side, and the horses dashed off. He felt the soft folds of her dress touching him. When she turned slightly to say something about the marvelous nights which tempered the heat-wave at New-

port, her right shoulder and elbow pressed him closely. Some subtle fragrance came from her that stirred him almost to a frenzy of longing; yet he dared not flinch away into a corner of the carriage. Perforce, he schooled his voice to utter the platitudes of the moment. Yes, he had been in Newport three whole days, and had not the remotest notion that she was there. He had come to buy horses, and might remain another week. Well, he *would* remain, now that they had met; for he was sure he would find a good deal to tell her of Bison and its folk once he had got over the novelty and unexpectedness of this meeting.

And all the time his heart was pounding madly, throbbing so furiously that he feared lest she should become aware of its lack of restraint, and he stooped forward in a make-believe glance at some building they were passing.

"That is the Casino," she said, misinterpreting his action, or pretending to—Heaven alone knows the extent of a woman's divination where a man is concerned! "We play tennis there, in the evenings, when it's so hot during the day. Are you a tennis-player, Derry? . . . Oh, I'm sorry! I quite forgot."

"I have been arousing your sympathy by false pretense," he said, and the laughter in his voice demanded a real effort. "I can walk and ride and jump and dance as well as ever, and I have taught three of the ranchmen to play tennis quite creditably. So, if the Newport stores run to flannels and rubber shoes——"

"Derry," she cooed, "you are not such a fraudulent person as you imagine. If you knew how much

you have told me tonight about yourself, you would be awfully surprised, as they say in London. But here we are at Mrs. Van Ralten's. Now, be nice to everybody; for I mean you to have a real good time in Newport. People here can be very pleasant acquaintances if you take them the right way."

CHAPTER VII

THE FORTY STEPS

During the next few days Power passed imperceptibly through many phases of thought and emotion. When his judgment regained its natural equipoise after the first bitter-sweet intoxication of finding his old sweetheart desirous as ever of his companionship, he appeared to subside into a state of placid acceptance of such restricted blessings as the gods could offer. Nancy made good her promise, and Newport society threw wide its doors to the good-looking and well-mannered visitor. No doubts were raised concerning his financial or social status. A word from the horse-fancying judge made it clear that the Westerner could not be a poor man, seeing that he had already bought at stiff prices a magnificent hunter and the best-matched pair of hackneys in the States, and was in treaty for another round dozen of valuable animals; while Mrs. Hugh Marten's manifest approval was sufficient to introduce any similarly favored young man to the most exclusive circle in the island.

Seeing that certain things were essential, Power spent money freely, supplying himself with a dog-cart, a groom, a valet, and the rest of the equipment which any man needed who would mix in that fashionable crowd without attracting attention by lack of it. Each morning he and Nancy, sometimes unaccompanied, but

more often mingling with a lively party, rode about the island, following rough tracks which are smooth roads nowadays, and visiting every favorite stretch of cliff and open country time and again. When the weather moderated its torrid rigor, and sports became possible in the grounds of the Casino or within the Polo Club's inclosure, he bore his full share. In all that pertained to horsemanship he was the equal of any man in Newport, and Nancy had not lost that perfect confidence in the saddle which life on a ranch demands. Someone gave prizes for a drag hunt, a hunting crop for the first man and a silver cup for the first woman in at the finish of a ten-miles' trail, and the two came in side by side, a furlong ahead of their closest follower. Luncheons, yachting parties, dinners, musicales, and dances crowded each day and often went far into the night. The heat-wave had put forward the almanac, and the Newport season was in full swing nearly a month in advance of its usual date.

Power retained his rooms at the Ocean House; but saw little of other inmates of the hotel unless they happened to mix in the same set. His friends of the dinner-table, except Dacre, had gone, and the Englishman, like Power, was made an honorary member of the Casino Club; so they kept up and developed an acquaintance which had begun so pleasantly.

The close intimacy between Mrs. Marten and the stranger from Colorado attracted slight comment. No breath of scandal fluttered the dovecotes of Newport. The behavior of the pair was exemplary, and, beyond the accepted fact that, if any hostess desired the presence of one she must invite the other, gossip about them

was noticeable by its absence. Their mutual use of Christian names from the outset established a tacit cousinship, and the only growl uttered behind their backs was an occasional complaint from some anxious mother who found her attractive daughters completely eclipsed, in the eyes of at least one eligible young man, by the millionaire's wife.

Once, and once only, before the crash came, did Nancy allude to the purloined letters. She and Power were riding along the Cliff Walk before breakfast, when she broached the subject quite unexpectedly.

"Derry, I want to ask you something," she said seriously. "Did my father and you ever quarrel without my knowledge—before I left Bison, I mean?"

"No," he said.

"Don't be stupid! I hate answers in monosyllables. When you say no like that, one suspects that it may really be a kind of yes."

"Then let me make it the most definite sort of negative. Remember, you fixed a period. The last time I spoke to Mr. Willard before I was—before I went to Sacramento—I had supper at the ranch."

He carried reminiscence no farther. She stole a look at him; but his eyes were fixed on a faint blur of smoke rising over the azure plain of the Atlantic from an invisible steamship. On that unforgetable night of three and a half years ago, a starlit night of spring, she had walked with him to the mouth of the Gulch, and in bidding each other farewell they had exchanged their first and last kiss.

"Father was certainly not an enemy of yours then," she went on, in a singularly even tone. Indeed, she

might have been debating a matter of utmost triviality. "It seemed to me that he always welcomed you at the ranch. Why did he become so bitterly opposed to you afterward?"

He could have fenced with her, but deemed it preferable to speak freely. "I think he was annoyed by my rapid success," he said. "He had made a failure of things generally, and I candidly admit it must have been exasperating to see a youngster like me, and a steady-going fossil like Mac, step in and secure a fortune out of a place where he had met with nothing but ill-luck. Those who get rich quick often incur animosity in that way."

For a brief space there was silence. They seemed to be listening to the slumberous plash of the breakers on the rocks far below, which, with the pleasant creaking of saddlery, and the hoofbeats and deep breathing of eager horses held in restraint, were the only sounds audible in that wondrous solitude. They were passing a part of the cliff known as the Forty Steps, a euphonious name describing a series of railed staircases, cut in the solid rock, which afforded an irregular if safe passage to the beach. Ochre Point, with its millionaire residences, lay a mile, or less, in front, and on their left was the illimitable ocean. After a bath and breakfast they had promised to join a large party on a steam yacht bound for Narragansett Pier, when luncheon and a picnic at a lighthouse would fill the afternoon. This day was precisely similar to any other day of a whole fortnight in its round of amusements. The weather was nearly perfection, and distinctly unsuited for a heart-searching discussion; but

Nancy seemed to be in a mood that either invited self-torture or wished to witness the writhings of her companion, because she would not leave a difficult subject alone.

"Supposing, Derry," she continued, "supposing I hadn't got married when I did, do you think you would have discovered the mine just the same?"

Now he was compelled to go off at a tangent. "You resemble the majority of your sex in your desire to raise non-existent bogies for the mere pleasure of slaying them," he began.

"Which is the bogy—my supposition or the mine?" she broke in.

"How can I imagine what would have happened in circumstances which did not take place? The discovery, or rediscovery, of the mine was one of those extraordinary bits of good luck which Fortune sometimes thrusts upon her favorites. It might have occurred if you had never left Bison; but, on the other hand, it might not."

She nodded her complete agreement. By not answering he had answered fully.

"Yes, the goddess was certainly kind to you," she said. "The cowboys did not often ride through the Gulch firing their revolvers. In fact, the only time I can recall any such riotous proceeding was on the day of my wedding. That must have been your lucky day."

She watched him closely; but his face showed no sign of emotion. Yet she was sure that his eyes narrowed somewhat as they continued to search the horizon, and his lips were set with a dourness hardly warranted by an enjoyable ride on a carefree morning.

Then she smiled, very slightly, as though she was well pleased. She was not cruel; but any woman who wants to assure herself that a man loves her will understand why Nancy Marten was putting Power on the rack, and even tightening the cords almost beyond endurance.

"I'm sorry if I have worried you, Derry," she said, with a tender caress in her voice that in no wise helped to mitigate his suffering. "One more question, and I have done. Have you told your mother that I am here?"

There was no help for it. He lied boldly.

"Yes," he said.

"What did she say?"

"I am expecting her reply any hour."

"And Mac? Did you give him my love?"

"I haven't written to Mac since I came to Newport; but I shall not omit a word of your message when I see him, or write, whichever comes first. . . . Have you any idea what time it is?"

"Time these lazy gees were stirring themselves. Come, Hector!"

She shook the reins on her horse's neck, and the big hunter jumped off in a fast canter. Power raced alongside, and the two struck into a byroad leading to Bellevue Avenue. Power was busying his brain to formulate some colorless phrase which would supply a natural-sounding comment by his mother on the fact that he had encountered an old friend in Newport. He knew well that he dared not tell her; for the tidings would distress her immeasurably. But he need not have troubled himself. Nancy never mentioned the matter again,

for the very convincing reason that she did not believe him. Her allusion to Mrs. Power was one last turn of the screw. She was as certain that he could no more explain her presence to his mother than she could explain his to her father. Twice had she written his name in letters to Denver, and twice had she destroyed the letter. On the night she met Power she had dashed off a hot and impetuous note asking Willard why Derry's letters had been withheld; but, in calmer mood, this dangerous query was given to the flames. On a second occasion, about a week later, Power's name crept inadvertently into a description of some incident at the Casino, and the warm blood rushed to her face and neck when she found how near she was to committing the letter to the post without having read it.

All that day Power was puzzled by a new serenity shining in Nancy's eyes. He could not guess that, more candidly analytical than he, she had looked fearlessly into the future and had discounted its agonies. She felt now that she had been tricked into a loveless marriage; that Marten had purchased her with exactly the same cold calculation of values which he would have applied to a business undertaking. Willard had proved as potter's clay in his hands, and every turn and twist of the project was clear to her vision as though her husband, yielding to sardonic impulse, had set forth the unsavory story in black and white. But it was one thing to recognize how she had been duped, and another to strike out boldly for instant freedom. And in that respect the woman was braver than the man. Power was content to live in the golden present, to stifle the longings and plaints of silent hours; while

the woman who loved him thought only of the end she now held firmly in view and recked little of the means whereby that end might be achieved.

Their unhappy plight was intensified by the fact that their characters had deepened and broadened alike during the years of separation. The boy and girl attachment of those heedless days in Colorado might not have withstood the strain of being thrown together again constantly after so long an interval, if the woman's nature had not advanced step by step with the man's. Experience of life, and the educative influences of foreign travel and good society, had done for Nancy what quiet study and seclusion from his fellow-men had done for Power. By such widely different paths they had reached a common standard of earnest purpose and high resolve, and Nancy, at any rate, was passionately determined not to sacrifice the remainder of her youth because of the unhallowed compact which sold her to gilded misery and robbed her of her one true mate in all the world.

As she did not blink the consequences, there remained but to carry through her desperate scheme as speedily and quietly as was compatible with no risk of failure. Her one difficulty lay with Power himself. She had first to break down his sense of honor, a task which could be accomplished only by making him see clearly that her life's happiness was at stake. And she knew him, oh, so well—far better than he knew himself! Let Derry once find tears in her eyes, tears which he alone could dispel, and the seeming fortress of his self-control would crumble into dust. Let her once twine her arms around him, and what man-made laws would

wrench them apart? For, by her reasoning, the solemn ordinances which govern frail human nature were wholly on her side. If marriage were, indeed, a divine institution, its very essence was profaned when Hugh Marten laid his sorry plan and made it effective by sheer force of money. She, the woman, would be called on to pay for her liberty in the coin minted of ill-repute, that base metal for whose currency her sex was mainly responsible. But those friends whom she valued would hear the truth, and they would rally round her, never fear! Why, in this delightful island, where pain and anguish seemed to be banished by the imperious ukase of deities presiding over the revels of the rich, people recognized as leaders of society had passed already through a furnace of scandal and scathing exposure such as she and her lover would never be called upon to face.

And that was why Power was at once bewildered and raised to the seventh heaven by her confident, contented smile when they met among the crowd of merry-makers on the yacht, or exchanged a few commonplace words when doing the round of Narragansett Bay and at dinner that evening in one of Newport's summer palaces.

As his dog-cart was in waiting, he had no excuse to escort her home, but, in saying goodnight, she contrived again to perplex and delight him by a whispered request.

"Derry," she murmured, "make no outside engagement for tomorrow evening. If you are already booked up, cry off. I want to dine with you in some quiet place—I suppose there is some hotel or café

in Newport where none of our friends go. Find out, and send me a note, telling me the time and place. I shall come in a hired carriage, and quietly dressed—not in dinner clothes, I mean—and you must do the same. I must have a long talk with you, wholly independent of our servants, you understand."

"I shall obey, at any rate," he said, with a smile that failed to conceal the unbounded surprise in his eyes. "May I put a question?"

"No, not now. Full details later, as people say in telegrams."

They parted, and he was so plagued by foreboding that he would have driven past the Ocean House had not the horse turned in at the gateway of its own accord. If Nancy's manner during the day had shown the least trace of worry or annoyance, he would have attributed her strange request to a desire to take him into her confidence. It was possible, for instance, that some busybody had warned her that a too marked preference for the society of one man among the many in Newport would probably reach her husband's ears; but, in that event, her outraged pride could never have been veiled by such a mask of unsullied cheerfulness. If any more drastic explanation of the next day's meeting suggested itself to his troubled mind, he crushed it resolutely. In his present mood, the slightest hint of scandal associated with Nancy's winsome personality due to their friendship was anathema. He would have endured any loss, fortune, even life itself, to save her name from besmirchment.

When he alighted from the dog-cart he knew it was useless to try and sleep; so he lit a cigar nd sat in

a remote corner of the veranda. Then he began seriously to analyze her words. They were to meet in clandestine fashion; not actually in the garments of disguise, but at a rendezvous so remote from the frequenters of the Casino as to run small risk of being identified. She would drive thither in a "hired carriage," and he was to leave his dog-cart and groom at home. Moreover, she inferred that he would not see her until the evening, since the locality of this *dîner à deux* was to be written; though they had hardly been separated by longer intervals than a couple of hours between seven o'clock in the morning and nearly midnight during each day of a fortnight. What did it all portend? Was this to be their last meeting? At that thought a fierce pain gripped him, and he was sorely tempted to call the gods to witness that he would not return to a lifetime of wandering in the wilderness. Yet, said a still, small voice within, was it not better so? She was another man's wife. He must remember that, remember it even when his pent-up passions stormed the citadel of his conscience, remember it when the sheer fragrance of her maddened his senses, remember it when the taste of Dead Sea fruit was bitterest in his mouth. Of what worth was he if, for her dear sake, he was not strong in knightly resolve? And how could he ever again dare to receive his mother's kiss if he betrayed the trust which she, at least, reposed in him?

A mournful and depressing reverie was disturbed by the arrival of a carriage at the porch. Four young people alighted—two honeymoon couples they were supposed to be—and their lively voices seemed to ring

the knell of his wrecked existence. He listened, only half hearing, while they chattered like magpies.

They had been to a dance at the Casino, and their broken comments told of a jolly evening, a capital band, the best floor that ever was laid, some wonderful dresses, and an unexcelled supper. Similar young people were telling each other exactly the same inane commonplaces all over the eastern part of America at that hour, and similar cackle would girdle the earth till the crack of doom. Probably the men were wise as he, and the women might be deemed by their swains pretty as Nancy; yet some malign despot among the powers which control poor humanity had decreed that he alone should never know these frivolous moments, never be granted these breathing-spaces of mild abandonment. And so, wroth with himself, and vexed with the sorry scheme of things, he went to his rooms.

Next morning, to make sure, he rode to Nancy's house. No; Mrs. Marten had not ordered her horse; in fact, she had not appeared as yet, and the pleasant-spoken butler, showing the requisite confidence in the discretion of a recognized friend, added that his mistress would not be "at home" to anyone before luncheon.

Then, the weather being glorious and the air like champagne, Power whistled care to the devil, and cantered into the town to review the ground for the night's fixture.

Newport today boasts of almost uncountable hotels and boarding-houses, nor was the area of choice limited in that respect nearly a generation ago. After careful scrutiny of various buildings in the business quar-

ter, Power selected a café run by a certain Giovanni Pestalozzi as the most promising. It looked clean and bright, and an Italian might be trusted to be discreet.

Getting a man to hold his horse, he interviewed Giovanni, and was assured that Delmonico's itself could not produce a better meal if the signor invited comparison. The signor wanted nothing elaborate, however. He admitted he was not well versed in either menus or wines, but demanded the best, and, after inspecting a well-furnished room overlooking the street, lodged a ten-dollar bill as earnest money, with a promise of ample largess if he were pleased. Then he rode away to the Ocean House, sent a note to Nancy, and received a reply which deepened his mystified dismay.

For she wrote:

"Dear Derry, I shall be there at seven-thirty. Meanwhile, go to the Casino, and tell everybody that you are summoned to New York on business, and mean to leave either tonight by the Fall River steamer or by first train tomorrow. You are traveling by the train to oblige me; so I am not asking you to indulge in polite fiction.

"Yours ever,

"NANCY."

He carried out instructions to the letter, and was chaffed mildly for deserting the place just as his friends were getting to like him. It was easy to promise a speedy return, if possible; though he felt, somehow, that he would never see Newport again. The conclusion of his horse-dealing transactions took up a good deal of the afternoon, and, to his regret, Dacre

was out with a yachting party; so he left a hurriedly written message about his pending departure.

Then he strolled out, went downtown by street car, and met Nancy when she alighted from a rickety cab at the door of Pestalozzi's café. She wore a cream-tinted dress, and her piquant features were daintily framed in a big Leghorn hat. It pleased him to find that she had not even deigned to veil her face, and her cheerful cry of recognition showed no conscience-stricken sense of guilt because of a meeting which, if known, must have excited the suspicions of her intimates.

"Ah, there you are, Derry!" she said. "Was there ever a more punctual person? Am I late? I had such a load of things to do that I left dressing till the last moment. Is this where we dine? What a jolly little café! It is just like hundreds of such establishments in Rome and Naples. I suppose these Italian restaurateurs employ their fellow-countrymen as builders and decorators; so they carry their architecture and fittings with them."

"They change their skies, but not their soups," said Power, falling in with her mood, and the driver of Nancy's cab recognized the adaptation of Horace's tag, and was pleased to grin, being himself a broken-down graduate of Harvard.

Ushered to the dining-room, they tackled the *hors d'œuvres* at once, and Nancy chatted about current events with the tranquil self-possession she would have displayed at Mrs. Van Ralten's dinner-table. The meal, excellently cooked and deftly served, marched to its end without a word from her as to its particular pur-

pose. She delighted Pestalozzi by taking minute instructions for the preparation of an exquisite spaghetti, and even noted the brands of Italian wines which should be tabled with each course. At half-past eight, when coffee appeared, she rose:

"Pay the bill now, Derry," she said. "We must be off in five minutes, and I am sure you want to smoke at least one cigarette in peace. Perhaps Signor Pestalozzi will be good enough to order a cab?"

Signor Pestalozzi was charmed, and decidedly puzzled. He believed for many a year that those two had dined at his café for a wager. If any doubter scoffed, he would say, with appropriate gesture:

"Sango la Madonna! I tella you he no squeeze-a de gell, not-ta one time; so, if dey no make-a de bet, what-a for he give 'er dat pranzo superbo?"

Really, from Giovanni's point of view, there was no answer.

"Tell the man to drive us to the Easton's Beach end of the Cliff Walk," she said nonchalantly, when the cab was in evidence, and away they went.

"There is no moon; but these summer nights are never quite dark," she began, by way of polite conversation. "It ought to be restful tonight down there by the Atlantic. It is a horrid thing to confess, but the memories of Venice which are most vivid in my mind are not connected with St. Mark's or the Doge's Palace, but center round just such a night as this on the Lido. Coming back in the gondola, I almost wanted to slip over the side into the still waters, and drift away to the unknown."

"Do we swim tonight, then?" he asked.

It was a relief to hear his own voice in some such apparently light-hearted quip. The cab was narrow, and hung on indifferent springs, and its lurching across the roadway to avoid other vehicles often threw him against Nancy's supple body. He could never touch her without feeling the thrill of contact, and, fight as he would against it, the desire to clasp her in his arms and stifle her protests with hot kisses would come on him at such moments with an almost overwhelming ecstasy.

"If I led, would you follow, Derry?" she whispered.

Heaven help him, it seemed as though she was nestling close deliberately; yet he refused to believe, and strove to answer with a jest.

"I have a picture of you and me striking out across the bay for Narragansett, like a pair of dolphins," he said.

"I thought of you that night on the Lido," she went on, unheeding. "I imagined then that when you skipped off to Sacramento you had forgotten the little girl of the Dolores ranch. At any rate, such was my every-day common-sense sort of belief; but tucked away in some cute little nerve center of intuition was another notion, which told me that we had been driven apart by wicked and deceitful contriving. And now, thank my stars, I know that my subconscious feeling was right! Oh, Derry! How you must have despised me! What if we had not met for many a year, and you had schooled yourself into real forgetfulness, and some other girl had crept into a corner of your heart, thrusting out poor little me forever?"

The gathering gloom without had now made the cab's

interior so dark that she could not see the rigid lines in his face, nor could she make out by any convulsive movement that his hands were clenched, and that beads of perspiration stood on his forehead. But she knew, yes, she knew, and timid fingers caught his arm.

"You are not to think me mad or cruel to speak in this way," she cooed. "I have looked into my very soul, Dear, and a great peace has come from my self-communing. You have wearied your clever brain with guesses as to my motive in meeting you tonight, and I giggled like a schoolgirl today at the thought of your absolute amazement when you read my note bidding you prepare to leave Newport. But it is all part and parcel of my plan, Derry, which rests on your reply to one small question. Do you want to go away from *me?* Are you ready to face a world in which there will be no Nancy, never, no more?"

"Ah, you are trying me beyond endurance!" he almost sobbed.

"But you *must* tell me *that*, Derry. I have gone a long way daringly. It is my privilege, my right. If you love me, you must expect it of me, because, as things are, I am forced to take the first step. But a woman must be sure that she is loved, and her lover alone can still her doubts."

An impulse stronger than his own strength of will brought strange, wild words to his dry lips.

"Nancy," he said, with the calm accents of despair, "I have never loved any woman but you, and, God willing, I never shall!"

"That is all that really matters," she sighed, with

a contented note in her voice that rang in his ears like a chord of sweet music heard from afar in the depths of a forest.

After that they sat in silence, she seemingly wrapped in dreams, and he wandering in a maze wherein impassable walls showed no gateway of escape; though the guarded path was alluring, and the air was heavy with the scent of flowers.

The cab stopped, and they alighted; for Nancy, demurely self-controlled, announced that she meant to take him for a stroll along the Cliff Walk. Power, deaf and blind to externals, would have accompanied her straightway; but she laughingly called him back from the clouds.

"Tell the cabman to wait," she said, "and give him some money, or the poor fellow will think that we have come this long way from town purposely, and mean to go off without payment."

He handed the driver a subsidy which caused the man to avow his willingness to wait till morning if necessary. Once away from the main road, and with no other company than the stars and the sea, Nancy took her escort's arm, and kept step with him.

"Now," she said, "I'm perversely disinclined to discuss personal affairs until we reach a certain rock at the foot of the Forty Steps. I mean to sit on that rock, and you will curl up on the shingle at my feet, and light a nice-smelling cigar, and listen while I explain the method in my madness of the last twenty-four hours. But I cannot arrange my thoughts in sequence till we are settled there comfortably. In the meantime, I'll make you acquainted with my best friend,

the Duchesse de Brasnes, whom you will meet some day in Paris, I hope, and then you will see for yourself some of her delightful eccentricities which I'll recount to you now, and you will laugh quietly and say, 'What an observant little person that Nancy is! Now, who'd have thought she could quiz and con a great lady of the Faubourg so accurately?' But you're not to misunderstand my joking; for the duchess is a dear, and I'm very fond of her."

To this day Power has never recalled a single syllable of Nancy's utterances concerning one of the leaders of Parisian society. All that he knew, or cared to know, was that the voice of his beloved was murmuring words which were curiously soothing to his tingling nerves. By this time he had cast scruples to the winds. His mind was armored with triple steel against any other consideration than that Nancy was by his side, that her hand rested confidently on his wrist, that he could feel her slender arm warm and soft near his heart.

And the supreme moment was rushing upon him with the wings of love on a summer's night, than which no flight of bird is so swift and noiseless. They reached the top of the rocky staircase, and began to descend. A fairy radiance from off the dark-blue mirror of the Atlantic made plain each downward step; but Nancy wore the high-heeled shoes which women affected then more generally than is the fashion today, and Power held her hand lest she slipped and fell. Thus they made their way to the beach, until they had almost negotiated the last short flight. Power, indeed, was standing on the shingle, and the girl—for, married woman

though she was, her years were still those of a girl—was poised gracefully on the lowermost slab.

There she hesitated perceptibly. His eyes met hers in a subtle underlook, and he saw that her face was deathly white. Yet there was neither fear nor indecision in her steadfast glance. Even while he asked dumbly why she waited, her lips parted, she held out her hands with a gesture of pleading, and she murmured:

"Oh, Derry, my own dear love, it is not the first but the last step which counts now!"

Then he took her in his arms, and their lips met—and for her there was no uncertainty ever more.

CHAPTER VIII

THE STEP THAT COUNTED

Of course, being a woman, she made believe that he had taken her by storm.

"Derry, dear, how *could* you?" she gasped, all rosy and breathless, and seemingly much occupied in smoothing her ruffled plumes during the first lull after the hurricane.

"You witch, who could resist you?" he muttered, showing well-marked symptoms of another attack.

"No, you'll just behave, and sit exactly where I shall point out!" she cried, and her pouting confidence gave eloquent testimony to the passing of an indelible phase in their relations. "And I am not a witch; but if you find it necessary to resist me, as you put it—— Well, there! only this once. We *must* sit down and be serious. I have such a lot to say, and so little time in which to say it."

The new note struck by the unfettered intimacy of her manner exercised an influence which Power would have regarded as a fantastic impossibility during those moments of delirium when first she clung to him, and both were shaken by irrepressible tumult. It said, far more plainly than impassioned speech, that she had thrown down all barriers, that she had counted the cost, and was giving herself freely and gladly to her mate. The recognition of this supreme surrender by a proud

woman, a woman to whom purity of thought was as the breath of life, administered a beneficial shock to his sorely tried nerves. Had a brilliant meteor flashed suddenly through space, and rushed headlong toward that part of the Atlantic which lapped the southern shore of Rhode Island, it could not have illuminated land and sea with more incisive clarity than did Nancy's attitude light up the dark places of his mind. Some stupendous thing had happened which would account for this miracle, and he must endeavor to understand. No matter what the effort needed, he must attend to her every word. In his inmost heart he knew that he cared not a jot what set of circumstances had brought about a development which he had not dared to dream of. He recked little of the cause now that its effect was graven on tablets more lasting than brass. But it was due to Nancy that he should be able to follow and appreciate her motives. He held fast to that thought in the midst of a vertigo. A waking nightmare had been changed in an instant into a beatitude akin, perilously akin, to that of the man and woman who found each other in the one perfect garden which this gray old world has seen, and no darkling vision of desert wastes and thorn-choked paths tortured the happy lovers now gazing fearlessly into each other's shining eyes. The heritage of "man's first disobedience" might oppress them all too soon; but, for that night at least, it lay hidden behind the veil. Exercising no slight command on his self-control, therefore, Power strove to revert to the well-ordered coherency of speech and action which he had schooled himself to adopt when in Nancy's presence.

"Forgive me if I have seemed rather mad," he pleaded, seating himself at her feet, and simulating a calmness which resembled the placid center of a cyclone. "During three long years I have hungered for the taste of your lips, Dear. That is my excuse, and it should serve; for I was content to wait as many decades if Fate kept firm in her resolve to deny you to me."

"You would never have yielded if I had not used a woman's guile?" she said, half questioning him, half stating a truism beyond reach of argument.

"There is little of guile in your nature, Nancy."

"Well, I think that is true, too; but it is equally true that a woman often takes what I may call a saner view of life than a man. She is quicker to admit the logic of accepted facts. If you discovered that some girl had won by false pretense, not your love, for love gilds the grossest clay, but your respect, as her husband, you would not spurn her with the loathing I feel now for the man who made me his wife. For that is what it has come to. I refuse to pose as Hugh Marten's wife in the eyes of the world one moment longer than is needful to obtain my freedom. His wife I have never been in the eyes of Heaven, because my Heaven is a place of love and content, and I have neither loved my husband nor been content with him, not for a single instant. Our marriage began with a lie, and has endured on a basis of lies. Such contracts, I believe, are void in law, and the principle which governs men in business should at least apply to that most solemn of all engagements, the lifelong union of husband and wife. Hugh Marten conspired with my father—hired him, I might rather say—to drive you and me apart,

Derry. The stronger and more subtle brain devised the means, and left it to the weaker one to carry out the scheme in sordid reality. As for me, I was helpless as a caged bird. How was I to guess that Marten, whom I knew only as the owner of the Bison mines and mills, had planned my capture? Even my poor, weak father did not suspect it till you were hundreds of miles away in California. And then how skilfully was the trap baited, and how swiftly it worked! You had not reached Sacramento before a lawyer wrote from Denver warning my father that the mortgagees were about to foreclose on the ranch. On several occasions previously he had been in arrears with the interest on the loan; but they had always proved considerate, and their just claims were met, sooner or later. Yet, in a year when scores of well-to-do ranchers were pressed for money, and when clemency became almost a right, these people proved implacable, and swooped down on him like a hawk on a crippled pigeon. . . . Derry, *you* bought the place—who were they?"

"I do not know. I dealt through a lawyer, and the vendor was Mr. Willard. He sold the property free of any encumbrance."

"Yet local opinion credited you and Mac with being a shrewd pair!" she commented, laughing softly, as if she were reviewing some tragi-comedy in a quizzical humor.

"We certainly wondered why Marten made things so easy for us—in other respects," he volunteered.

"Ah, then, you *did* have a glimmering suspicion of the truth? I guessed it; though I could not be absolutely certain till yesterday morning, when Mr. Berson

refused to answer my pointblank question. He would not lie, but he dared not tell the truth; so he fell back on the feeble subterfuge that, after the mighty interval of three and a half years, he could not recall the exact facts."

"Benson? Did you write to him?"

The surprise in Power's voice was not feigned. He was beginning to see now something of the fixed purpose which had governed her actions during the past twenty-four hours.

"Yes," she said composedly. "It was hardly necessary, but I wanted to dispose of my last doubt; though in my own mind I was sure of the ground already. My father went straight to Denver on receipt of that letter, and, of course, chanced to travel by the same train as Hugh Marten, the man to whom the whole amount of the mortgage was little more than a day's income. Marten was gracious, the lawyer-man adamant. Within a week I was told of a new suitor, and of my father's certain and complete ruin if I refused him. . . . Ah, me! How I wept! . . . When did you post your first letter, Derry?"

"Two days after I arrived at the placer mine," he replied unhesitatingly. The chief revelation in Nancy's story was her crystal-clear knowledge of facts which, he flattered himself, he had kept from her ken. Then his heart leaped at the thought that she had known of his love from the night they met in the dining-room of the Ocean House. But he choked back the rush of sentiment; for she was demanding his close attention.

"And I wrote on or about that same date," she went on. "My father—Heaven forgive him!—stole your let-

ters to me; but the scheme for suppressing my letters to you must have been concocted before you went to Sacramento. Such foul actions are unforgivable! I, for one, refuse to be bound by the fetters which they forged. I come to you, my dear, as truly your wife, as unstained in soul and body, as though Hugh Marten had never existed!"

A sudden note of passion vibrated in her voice, and Power realized, by a lightning flash of intuition, with what vehement decision she had severed already the knot which seemed to bind her so tightly. He fancied it was her due that he should endeavor to relax an emotional strain which was becoming unbearable.

"It's a mighty good thing we are Americans," he said. "Here divorce is neither hard to obtain nor highly objectionable in its methods. We—at any rate, I—must consult some lawyer of experience. The laws differ in the various states. That which is murder and sudden death in Ohio is a five-dollar proposition in Illinois; but the legal intellect will throw light on our difficulty. Meanwhile——"

He stopped awkwardly, aware that, although she was apparently listening to his words, they were making no impression on her senses. A sudden silence fell, and the hitherto unheeded noises of the night smote on his ears with uncanny loudness. The leisured plash of waves so tiny that they might not be dignified by the name of breakers swelled into a certain strength and volume as his range of hearing spread, and the faint cries of invisible sea-fowl now jarred loudly on the quietude of nature. A pebble rolled down the cliff, and he could mark its constantly accelerated leaps

until it reached the shingle with a crash which, even to a case-hardened pebble, betokened damage.

"Meanwhile——" prompted Nancy, in a still, small voice.

So she had followed what he was saying. What was it that he meant to say? Something about the rocks and shoals that lay ahead before he could take her to some safe anchorage. Nevertheless, he shied off at a tangent, and chose haphazard the one topic which his sober judgment might have avoided.

"I was about to utter a banal remark; but it may as well be put on record and dismissed," he said. "It is fortunate that I am a rich man. Mere weight of money can achieve nothing against us; while the possession of ample means will simplify matters in so far as we are concerned personally."

"Were those really the words on the tip of your tongue, Derry?"

"Well, no," he admitted.

"Are you afraid of hurting my feelings?"

"You are right, Dear. As between you and me there should be no concealment. We have to face the immediate future. We must consider how to surmount the interval, short though it may be——"

"Interval! What interval?"

"You cannot secure a divorce without some sort of legal process, and the law refuses to be hurried."

"Ah, yes. Divorce—law—they are words which have little meaning here and now."

"But they are all-important. Awhile ago you spoke of your Paris friends, and there are others, like Mrs. Van Ralten, whose sympathies and help will be of real

value in years to come. You see, I want you to hold your pretty little head higher as Mrs. John Darien Power than you ever held it as Mrs. Hugh Marten."

"That will cost no great effort, Derry. If we have to pass through an ordeal of publicity, we can surely use the vile means for our own ends, so that our friends may know the whole truth. . . . Derry, if you were not such a good and honorable man, you would not be so dense."

In his anxiety to follow each twist and turn of her reasoning he had crept nearer, and was now on his knees, having imprisoned her hands in his, and peering intently into her face. In that dim light her eyes shone like faintly luminous twin stars, and he laughed joyously when, to his thinking, he had solved the doubt that was troubling her.

"If it will help any that all the world should know that I, the aforesaid John Darien Power, have been, and am, and will ever remain frantically in love with a lady heretofore described as Nancy Willard, I shall nail a signed statement to that effect on the Casino notice-board tomorrow morning," he vowed.

She gently released her hands, placed them lovingly on his cheeks, and drew him close, so that he could not choose but yield to any demand she might make.

"Derry," she said, kissing him with that soothing air of maternity which is a woman's highest endowment, "though I am going to say something dreadfully forward and bold, I shall risk all lest I lose you, and, if that happens, my poor heart will break and be at rest forever. Even now you do not see whither I am leading you. You never would see unless I spoke

plainly. My love for you may be fierce and terrible; but I am only a weak woman, a woman just emerged from girlhood, and I want to be saved from myself. If, for your dear sake, I am to cut adrift from the past, I cannot be left alone. By your side I can face the storm, but I shudder at the thought of protests, appeals, influences perhaps more potent than I imagine in my present new-found mood of hatred of the wrong which has been done me. Derry, why, do you think, have I asked you to leave Newport early tomorrow?"

Stirred by a common impulse, they both stood upright. All at once she seemed to be unable to bear his burning gaze any longer, and her head sank on his breast. He had thrown a protecting arm around her shoulders, and he felt her supple body quiver under a sob which she tried to restrain.

"Nancy," he whispered, "am I to take you with me?"

"Yes," she said brokenly.

"You mean that we are to be a law unto ourselves, and thereby make divorce proceedings inevitable? I *must* put it that way, my dear one! I *must* understand!"

"Yes, Derry. You *must* understand. There is no other way."

He held her so tightly that he became aware of the mad racing of her heart, and a great pity stirred his inmost core. How she must have suffered! What agony was this forced discarding, one by one, of her maidenly defenses! Though he had been blind and deaf solely because of the depth and intensity of his love and reverence, he could utter now only a halting

plea that would explain his slowness of perception.

"Forgive me, Dear!" he murmured. "I can find nothing better to say than that—forgive me! I was so absorbed in my own dream of happiness that I gave no heed to the means. But I shall never again be so thoughtless."

"Thoughtless!" She raised her sweet face once more, tear-stained and smiling. "You thoughtless, Derry? Women thank God for that sort of thoughtlessness in men like you!"

And with that, before he could forestall or even divine her intention, she had withdrawn from his embrace, and had run lightly up half a dozen of the Forty Steps.

"Come!" she cried, with an alteration of manner and voice that was almost stupefying to her hearer. "We have been here an unconscionable time, and just think how awful it will be if our cabman has taken home his tired horse! Of course, even at the twelfth hour, I have loads of things to pack. And, since I don't know where I am going, the task of selecting a reasonable stock of clothes is too appalling for words. Oh, don't gaze at me as if I were a ghost, Derry! I am not about to flit away into space. You will have another half hour of my company; because, let that poor horse do his best, we sha'n't reach our respective habitations till long after eleven o'clock."

Yet she was neither excited nor hysterical. A great load had been lifted off her heart, and her naturally gay temperament was asserting itself with vital insistence. There was no possibility of drawing back now. Nothing but death could separate her from her lover.

Nothing but death! Well, that separation must come in the common order of things; but a bright road stretched before her mind's eye through a long vista of years, and her spirit sang within her and rejoiced exceedingly. No shred of doubt or hesitation remained. She had passed already through the storm, and though its clouds might roll in sullen thunder among distant hills yet awhile, the particular hilltop on which she stood was bathed in sunlight.

Above all else, despite her complete trust in Power, she thrilled with the consciousness that her love contained a delicious spice of fear, and that is why she climbed the Forty Steps in a sort of panic; so that he marveled at her change of mood, and discovered in it only one more of the enchantments with which his fancy clothed her.

The driver regarded them as a moonstruck couple, since that sort of moon shines ever on fine evenings by the sea. He was obviously surprised when the lady's address was given, because he expected a return journey to one of Newport's many boarding-houses; but any suspicions he may have entertained were dispelled when he witnessed a polite farewell in the presence of a pompous butler, and heard Nancy say:

"I am going straight to my room now to write that letter to my father. Then I shall finish packing. What time is the train—nine o'clock. Goodnight, Derry! Sleep well!"

If he thought at all about the matter, the cabman might well have imagined that no young lady in Newport that night had used words less charged with explosive properties; yet no giant cannon on t.. war-

ships swinging to their moorings in the bay could have rivaled the uproar those few simple sentences might create. Moreover, he heard the gentleman address the butler by name, and witnessed the transference of a tip, accompanied by the plain statement that the giver was leaving Newport early next day. Indeed, once he had deposited his fare at the Ocean House, the man probably gave no further heed to one or other of the pair who had some foolish liking for a prolonged stroll on the cliffs overlooking the Atlantic, nor, to his knowledge, did he ever again see them, or even hear their names spoken of.

Power was crossing the veranda with his alert, uneven strides when a voice came out of the gloom:

"Hullo, Power, that you? Come and join me in a parting drink."

It was Dacre, the one person in the hotel from whom such an invitation was not an insufferable nuisance at the moment.

"I'm in a bit of a hurry," said Power, "as I am off tomorrow morning; but I'm glad to find you here. You've received my note?"

"Yes. Sit down. I'm just going to light a cigar, and the match will help you to mix your own poison. Had a pleasant evening?"

It was a natural though curiously pertinent question; but Power was at no loss for an answer.

"I have really been arranging certain details as a preliminary to my departure," he said.

"Where are you bound for, New York?"

"After some days, or weeks, perhaps. I hardly know yet."

"You've changed your plans, it seems?"

Power remembered then that he had invited the Englishman to visit Colorado. It was practically settled that Dacre should come West within three weeks or a month.

"By Jove!" he cried, "you must accept my apologies. Of course, I would have recalled our fixture in good time, and have written postponing your trip to Bison. Circumstances beyond my control will prevent my return home for an indefinite period. I can't tell you how sorry I am."

"Same here," said the other, with John Bull directness.

"But neither of us is likely to shuffle off the map yet awhile," continued Power. "You have my address, both in Colorado and at my New York bank, and I have yours. Keep me posted as to your movements, and we shall come together again later in the year."

He was eager to dissipate a certain starchiness, not wholly unjustifiable, which he thought he could detect in his companion's manner; but the discovery of its true cause disconcerted him more than he cared to acknowledge, even to himself. Enlightenment was not long delayed. Dacre's evident lack of ease arose from circumstances vastly more important than the disruption of his own plans; he hesitated only because he was searching for the right way to express himself.

"You and I have cultivated quite a friendship since we forgathered here nearly three weeks ago," he began, after a pause which Power again interpreted mistakenly.

"Yes, indeed. Won't you let me explain——"

"Not just yet. You are on the wrong tack, Power. You believe I'm rather cut up about the postponement of your invitation. Not a bit of it. This little globe cannot hold two men like you and me, and keep us apart during the remainder of our naturals. No, mine is a different sort of grouch. Now, I'm a good deal older than you. You won't take amiss anything I tell you, providing I make it clear that I mean well?"

"I can guarantee that, at any rate."

Power's reply was straightforward enough; but his tone was cold and guarded. The chill of premonition had fallen on him. A man whom he liked and respected was about to fire the first shot on behalf of unctuous rectitude and the conventions.

"I may as well open with a broadside," said Dacre, unwittingly adopting the simile of social warfare which had occurred to his hearer. "I was out with a yachting party this afternoon, and we were becalmed. Three of us came away from the New York Yacht Club's boathouse about half-past eight, and took a street-car in preference to one of those rickety old cabs. Luckily, by the accident of position, I was the only one of the three who saw a lady and gentleman come out of an Italian restaurant. The presence of two such people in that locality was unusual, to say the least; but, as the man was a friend of mine, and the lady one whom I admire and respect, I said nothing to the other fellows."

"That was thoughtful of you," broke in Power, half in sarcasm; for he was vastly irritated that he had not contrived affairs more discreetly, and half in genuine recognition of Dacre's tact.

"The thinking came later," said the Englishman

slowly. "When all is said and done, a little dinner *à l'Italienne* might pass by way of a joke—a harmless escapade at the best, or worst. But, when I reach my hotel and find a note announcing that the man is leaving Newport unexpectedly, and when I hear at the Casino that the woman also is arranging to meet her father in New York, with equal unexpectedness, I am inclined to ask the man, he being something more than a mere acquaintance, if there is not a very reasonable probability that he is making a damned fool of himself. Now, are we going to discuss this thing rationally, or do you want to hit me with a heavy siphon? If the latter, kindly change your mind, and let's talk about the next race for the America's Cup."

Here no solemn diapason of wave and shingle relieved an unnerving silence. Not even the distant rumble of a vehicle broke the tension. The hour was late for ordinary traffic, early for diners and dancers. A deep hush lay on the hotel and its garden. It was so dark that the street lamps, twinkling few and far between the trees, appeared to diffuse no larger area of light than so many fireflies.

"Are we alone here?" said Power, speaking only when an uneasy movement on Dacre's part bestirred him.

"Yes. I saw to that when I heard your cab. I timed you to a nicety."

"You must be experienced in these matters."

"I have been most sorts of an idiot in my time."

"You are quite sure we are not overheard?"

"As sure as a man can be of anything."

"Then I recognize your right to question me. To-

night you, tomorrow all Newport, will know what has happened——"

"Pardon an interruption. Women are invariably careful of the hour, howsoever heedless they may be of next week. Newport knows nothing, will know nothing, except that a popular lady is meeting her father in New York, the said father having written to say he is coming East. His letter is Exhibit A, yours to me Exhibit B, or it would be if it weren't burnt."

"A legal jargon is not out of place. When the lady in question has secured a divorce she will become my wife. Now you have the true explanation of my seeming discourtesy. When I am married, I shall entertain you at Bison if I have to escort you from Tokio, or even from Sing Sing."

"But——"

"There are no 'buts.' She was stolen from me, decoyed away by the tricks of the pickpocket and the forger. I am merely regaining possession of my own. It was not I who cleared up the theft. That was her doing. There can be no shirking the consequences. If my mother, whom I love and venerate, implored me on her bended knees to draw back now from the course I have mapped out, I would stop my ears to her pleading, because I could not yield to it."

"Oh, it's like that, is it?"

"Just like that."

Dacre struck another match, and relighted the cigar which he had allowed to go out after the first whiff or two. Power noticed that the flare of the match was not used as an excuse for scrutinizing him, because his

friend's eyes were studiously averted. Then came the quiet, cultured voice from the darkness:

"If that's the position, old man, I wish you every sort of good luck, and a speedy end to your worries, and I'll come at your call to that ranch of yours, from the other end of the earth, if need be."

Again a little pause. Then Power spoke:

"You ring like true metal all the time, Dacre. May I ask you one thing—are you married?"

"No, nor ever likely to be. I—I lost her, not by fraud, but by my own folly. But she understood—before she died. That is my only consolation. It must suffice. It has sufficed."

"I'm sorry. I touched that chord unthinkingly. I merely wanted to have your full comprehension—and sympathy."

"You had both already. I would not have dared to intrude if I did not realize that a man talking to another man can raise points which are lost sight of when a woman—*the* woman—is the other party to the debate."

"Would you care to hear a brief record of my life during the last few years?"

"Go right ahead! I'm not a gossip. If I know something of the truth, I may be able to stop a rill of scandal one of these days. There's bound to be chatter, even though old Mr. Willard comes East."

"You know the name, then?"

"Certainly. Mrs. Van Ralten was speaking about him tonight—not very favorably, either. Said she couldn't understand how such a man could have such a daughter."

"Mrs. Van Ralten is a remarkably intelligent woman," said Power dryly. "I never saw Nancy's mother; but I imagine that this is a case of exclusive heredity, because there never were two more diverse natures than Nancy's and her father's. She is the soul of honor, and would give her life for a principle; while he bartered his own daughter for a few thousand dollars. If I were not convinced of that, do you believe I would besmirch her good name and my own by so much as tonight's mild adventure in an Italian café?"

"I can give you easy assurance on that head. I have seldom been so surprised as when I saw the pair of you leaving the place and entering a cab."

"That was a mere episode, a first meek onslaught on the proprieties, so to speak. You will understand fully when I have told you the whole story."

They talked, or rather Power talked and Dacre listened, till a clock struck twelve somewhere. Carriages began to roll along the neighboring avenues, and lamps occasionally flitted past the hotel. Two or three vivacious groups crossed the veranda, and a porter turned on a lamp. Then Power found that his English friend had placed their chairs in a sort of alcove formed by a disused doorway flanked on each hand by a huge palm growing in a wooden tub which held a ton of earth, or more; so they were well screened.

"You meant to force me to confess," he said, smiling.

"Yes. It might have been merely folly on your part."

"But now?"

"Now it is Fate's own contriving. You don't want

to escape; but you couldn't if you did. Or, that is awkwardly put. What I mean is——"

Dacre's meaning was clear enough; but he never completed the sentence. A cab, laden with luggage, drove up, and a slightly built, elderly man alighted.

"This the Ocean House?" he inquired, when a porter hurried forward.

"Yes, sir," and the man took a portmanteau from the driver.

"Hold on, there! I'm not sure I shall want a room. How far is 'The Breakers' from here, Mrs. Marten's house?"

"Quite a ways," said the cabman. "Two miles an' a bit."

The new arrival seemed to consider the distance and the lateness of the hour.

"Is Mrs. Marten in Newport, do you know?" he asked.

"Yep. I tuk her downtown this evenin'."

"Alone?"

"Guess that's so."

"Where was she going?"

"Wall, ye see, I was on the box, an' de lady was inside; so we didn't git anyways sociable."

The stranger evidently bethought himself, and turned to the porter again. He could not know that a Harvard man was merely speaking in the vernacular. "Have you a Mr. Power staying here?" he asked.

"Yes, sir."

"Is he here now?"

"If he isn't in the hotel, he'll be at the Casino. Shall I ring up his room, sir?"

"No, no. I'll see him in the morning. It's too late

to go any farther tonight, and I'm rather tired and shaken up. My train was derailed, and we are hours behind time. Give me a decent room. I suppose I can have breakfast at eight o'clock?"

"Any time you like, sir."

The cab went off, and the inquisitive visitor entered the building. The two men seated behind the palms had not uttered a syllable while the foregoing conclave was in progress.

"Mr. Francis Willard, I presume?" murmured Dacre, when the retreating footsteps had died away.

"Yes," said Power.

"Three days ahead of the time stated in his letter, I presume further."

"That must be so."

"Foxy. He fits your description. What are you going to do now?"

"Finish my yarn, if I am not wearying you, and leave Newport at seven A.M. instead of nine-ten. The fox broke cover just a little too soon."

"By gad, yes! I think I'll recognize that cabman again. If I come across him, I'll tip him for you. He deserves it. . . . The swine! To start pumping the townsfolk before he was ten seconds in the place, and about his own daughter, too! Dash his eyes—wait till someone refers him to me for news of you! I'll head him into the open country quick enough—trust me!"

Dacre's comments might sound rather incoherent; but it was painfully evident that Nancy's father had created a bad first impression, and he was one of those unhappy mortals who could not afford to do that, because he never survived it.

CHAPTER IX

THE CHASE

In the morning Power's first care was to ascertain the position of the room allotted to Willard. As he imagined, it proved to be in the back part of the hotel, every apartment in the front section being occupied by season residents. Shortly before six o'clock, therefore, he drove away in an open carriage, confident that nothing short of an almost incredible chance would bring the older man to vestibule or porch at that early hour. Halting the vehicle at a corner near Nancy's abode, he walked to the house, and surprised the earliest servants astir by bidding one of them wake Mrs. Marten at once, as he had news of her father.

"Nothing serious," he added, with a reassuring smile at a housemaid whose alarmed face showed an immediate sense of disaster. "Mrs. Marten is leaving Newport today, I think, and my message may decide her to start sooner—that is all."

But Nancy had seen him from her bedroom window, and now fluttered downstairs in a dressing gown.

"What is it, Derry?" she asked, and mistress and maid evidently shared the feminine belief that such an untimely call presaged something sensational and therefore sinister.

"Don't be frightened," he said cheerfully, knowing how essential it was that she should not be startled

into an exclamation which might betray her secret to the listening servants. "I heard from Dacre last night that you meant to meet Mr. Willard in New York, and I have reason to believe that you ought to depart by the first train. To do that, you must get away from the house in forty minutes. Can you manage it?"

She came nearer, seeking the truth in his warning eyes, carrying a brave front before the maids, but with fear in her heart, because she and her lover had eaten of the forbidden fruit, and now they were as gods, knowing good and evil.

"Mr. Dacre!" she repeated. "I suppose Mary Van Ralten told him what I said. But I don't quite understand. Why should I hurry my departure?"

Nothing in this that anyone might hear and deem significant. Power laughed, as though her air of slight alarm had amused him.

"Come into the veranda," he said. "You are not afraid of the morning air, and it is not on my conscience that I have robbed you of an hour's sleep, since you were up and around before I arrived."

When they were alone, though shut off from inquisitive ears by wire-screen doors only, he said, in a low voice:

"Don't say anything that will cause comment, but your father arrived at the Ocean House soon after midnight, and means to be here about nine o'clock. Our train leaves at seven. Will you use your own carriage, or shall I send a cab in half an hour? You will be ready, of course?"

Nancy was not of that neurotic type of womankind

which screams or faints in a crisis. "Y-yes," she murmured. "In less time, if you wish."

"No need to rush things," he said coolly. "He is not to be called till eight. I heard him give the order."

"You *heard* him!"

"Yes. Thanks to Dacre, when he arrived I was sitting in the veranda, well hidden, as it happened; so I planned to reach you this morning with a couple of hours in hand."

"But, Derry, I have a note written, and ready for the post. I can't explain now——"

"Put the note in your pocket, and deal with the new situation at leisure. There's only one thing I regret——"

"Regret! Oh, Derry, what is it?" And again the shadow of fear darkened her eyes, eyes of that rare tint of Asiatic blue known as blende Kagoul, a blue darker at times than any other, and again, bright, dazzling, full of promise, rivaling the clear sky on a summer's night.

"That I dare not take you in my arms and kiss you," he said. "You look uncommonly pretty in that negligée wrap."

She blushed, and put up a hand to reassure herself lest her hair might be tumbling out of its coils. Then she ran to the screen doors and pushed them apart.

"I can't wait another second," she said. "Please send that cab. Our own men will hardly be at the stables yet."

She waved a hand and vanished. Her hurried orders to the domestics came in the natural sequence of

things, and caused no surprise. When she drove away from the house at twenty minutes of seven every member of her establishment believed that Mrs. Marten had gone to join her father in New York, but, for some reason communicated by her "cousin," was traveling by the first train of the day instead of the second. The only perplexed person left in "The Breakers" was Julie, the French maid, who thought she would find a holiday in Newport dull, and was, moreover, genuinely concerned because of the scanty wardrobe which her mistress had taken.

Oddly enough, Power, waiting with stoic anxiety outside the New York, New Haven & Hartford station, shared some part of Julie's thought when he saw Nancy's two small steamer trunks and a hatbox.

"Well!" he cried, helping her to alight. "Here have I been worrying about the capacity of the cab to hold your baggage, and you bring less than I!"

"Pay the man," she said quietly. Then, under cover of the approach of a porter with a creaking barrow, she added, "I am coming to you penniless and plainly clad as ever was Nancy Willard. You wish that, don't you?"

"You dear!" he breathed; but she had her full answer in the color that suffused his bronzed face and the light that blazed in his eyes.

He had experienced no difficulty in securing the small coupé of a Pullman car to Boston. In that train there was little likelihood of any chance passenger recognizing them. In actual fact, they had the whole car to themselves. Nancy, who could not banish the notion that the whole world was watching her, was ner-

vous and ill at ease until the train pulled out of the station. She even started and flushed violently when the conductor came to examine their tickets, whereupon the man smiled discreetly and Power laughed.

"You're the poorest sort of conspirator," he said, when the door was closed on the intruder. "We had better admit straight away that we're a honeymoon couple, because everybody will know it the instant they look at you."

But he failed to charm away the terror that oppressed her spirit. She felt herself a fugitive from some unseen but awful vengeance, and her heart quailed.

"Derry," she said, almost on the verge of tears, "I'm beginning to be afraid."

"Afraid of what?"

Somehow, despite his utter lack of experience of woman's ways, he had guessed that this moment would arrive, and was, to that extent, prepared for it.

"Of everything. I—I know that I alone am to blame. It is not too late for you to draw back."

"Why do you think I might wish to draw back?"

"Because of the horrid exposure you must face in the near future."

"My only trouble is that I may not bear your share as well as my own, Nancy. The combined burden would lie light as thistledown on my shoulders. Let us be true to ourselves, and it will surprise you to find how readily the world, our world, will accept our view."

"In your heart of hearts, Derry, do you believe we are doing right?"

"When ethics come in at the door love flies out by the window. We are righting a grievous wrong, and, al-

though our actions must, for a time, be opposed to the generally accepted code of morals, I do honestly believe that this is a case in which the end justifies the means."

"If I were stronger, Dear, we might have kept within stricter bounds."

"You might have gone to Reno, for instance, and qualified for a divorce by residence?"

"Something of the sort."

"I'll take you to Reno, if you like; but I'm going with you. Don't forget that he who has begun has accomplished half. Why are you torturing yourself, little woman? Shall I tell you?"

"I wish you would."

"Because," and his arms were thrown around her, and he kissed away the tears trembling on her lashes, "because, like me, you are really afraid lest we may be too happy. But life is not built on those lines, Deary. It would still hold its tribulations if we could set the calendar back to an April night of three years ago, and you and I were looking forward with bright hope to half a century of wedded joy, with never a cloud on the horizon, and never a memory of dark and deadly abyss crossed in the bygone years. Let us, then, not lose heart in full view of the one threatening storm. Let us rather rejoice that we are facing it together. That is how I feel, Nancy. I have never loved you more than in this hour, and why should I repine because of the greatest gift God can give to man, the unbounded love and trust of the one woman he desires? You are mine, Nancy, mine forever, and I will not let you go till I sink into everlasting night."

After that, an interlude, when words were impossible, else both would have sobbed like erring children. At last Nancy raised her eyes, and smiled up into her lover's face, and he understood dimly that, when a woman's conscience wages war with her emotions, there may come a speedy end to the unequal strife.

"Derry," she whispered, "have you realized that I don't know where you are taking me?"

So the battle had ceased ere it had well begun. Perhaps she was hardly conscious—if she were, she gave no sign—of the crisis dissipated by that simple question. It closed with a clang the door of retreat. Henceforth they would dree their weird hand in hand. They would look only to the future, and stubbornly disregard the past. Shutting rebellious eyes against a mandate written in letters of fire, they would seek comfort in Herrick's time-serving philosophy:

"Gather ye rosebuds while ye may,
Old Time is still a-flying;
And this same flower that smiles today
Tomorrow will be dying."

The train slackened speed. They were nearing a wayside station, and they drew apart in confusion like a pair of lovers surprised in some quiet corner. But Power laughed softly, and Nancy caught a new note of content in his voice.

"A nice thing!" he cried. "The girl is safe aboard the lugger, and I don't even tell her to what quarter of the globe she is being lugged. But the sailing directions are easy. We breakfast at Boston. Don't you dare say you cannot eat any breakfast!"

"I can, or I shall, at any rate," she retorted bravely.

"Then Boston will be the best place on earth at nine o'clock. Afterward we take the Burlington road, and cross Lake Champlain. There's a first-rate hotel on the west shore, and we stay there tonight. To-morrow we plunge into the Adirondacks, and lose ourselves for as long as we please. How does that program suit my lady?"

"Whither thou goest——" she said, and her eyes fell.

Thus did they thrust dull care into the limbo of forgetfulness, and if there was standing at the gates of their Eden a frowning angel with a drawn sword, their vision was clouded, and they could not see him.

. . . . . .

America rises early, even in holiday-making Newport; so Mr. Francis Willard did not breakfast in solitary state. When he entered the dining-room at half-past eight next morning he cast a quick glance around the well-filled tables, and ascertained instantly that the one man whom he did not wish to see was absent.

Toward the close of the meal he beckoned the head waiter.

"Where does Mr. Power sit usually?" he inquired.

"Over there, sir, with Mr. Dacre, the English gentleman, at the small table near the second window."

Following directions, Willard noted a good-looking man, apparently about forty years old, who was studying the menu intently. As a matter of fact, Dacre had seen the newcomer's signal, and guessed what it portended.

"Oh, indeed! Mr. Dacre a friend of his?" went on Willard.

"They are often together, sir."

"And where is Mr. Power this morning?"

"He left by the first train, sir."

For some reason this news was displeasing; though Power's departure made plausible any inquiries concerning him.

"That's a nuisance," said Willard. "I—wanted to meet him. I came here last night for that purpose. Do you happen to know where he has gone, and for how long?"

The head waiter was not in the habit of answering questions about his patrons indiscriminately.

"I can't say, I'm sure, sir," he replied; "but if you were to ask Mr. Dacre he might know."

Willard weighed the point. In one respect, he was candid with himself. He had come to Newport to spy on Nancy, and, if necessary, to put a prompt and effectual end to any threatened renewal of her friendship with Power. The intuition of sheer hatred had half warned him that the man whom he regarded as his worst enemy might possibly visit Rhode Island; but some newspaper paragraph about the purchase of horses bred in the state of New York had lulled his suspicions until he chanced to meet Benson at lunch in the Brown Palace Hotel. Marten's secretary was worried. He had replied to Nancy's letter the previous day; but was not quite sure that he had taken the right line, and he seized the opportunity now to consult her father. Of course, he did not reveal his employer's business, and Willard was the last person with whom he could discuss the mortgage transaction fully; but he saw no harm in alluding casually to Mrs.

Marten's curious inquiry, and was relieved to find that her father agreed with the answer he had given.

The actual truth was that Willard felt too stunned by the disclosure to trust his own speech. He was well aware already that Marten had used him as a cat's-paw in bringing about the marriage; but that phase of the affair had long ceased to trouble him. The real shock of Benson's guarded statement lay in Nancy's point-blank question. Why had she put it? What influence was at work that such serious thought should be given to his financial straits of nearly four years ago?

In the upshot, he left Denver by that night's mail; though the letter in which he spoke tentatively of a visit to Newport, and of which Nancy had availed herself in talk with her friends at the Casino, had been only a day in the post, and, in the ordinary course of events, demanded a reply before he undertook a journey of two thousand miles.

And now he was vaguely uneasy. Though he hated the sight of Power, he wished heartily that the interloper who had snatched from him the bonanza of the Dolores Ranch had remained in Newport during this one day, at least. Yes, he would speak to Power's British acquaintance, and glean some news of the man to whom he had done a mortal wrong and therefore hated with an intensity bordering on mania.

Dacre saw h[illegible]oming; so it was with the correct air of polite indi[illegible]ce that he heard himself addressed by an elderly stranger.

"I'm sorry to disturb you," said Willard, "but the head waiter tells me that your friend, Mr. Power, has left Newport. As I am anxious to have a word with

him, I thought that, perhaps, you wouldn't mind telling me his whereabouts. My name is Willard, and I arrived here from Denver at a late hour yesterday; at midnight, in fact, my train having been delayed by an accident."

Nancy's father was well spoken. He owned a certain distinction of manner and bearing. Like the majority of undersized men, he was self-assertive by nature; but education and fifty years of experience had rounded the angles of his character, and, in a matter of this sort, he carried himself with agreeable ease.

Dacre was all smiles instantly. "What! Mrs. Marten's father?" he cried. "Delighted to meet you! Sit down, Mr. Willard. Let us become better known to each other!"

Willard was hardly prepared for this cordial recognition; but he shook hands affably, and seated himself in Power's chair, as it chanced.

"You have heard of me from my daughter, I suppose?" he began.

"Yes. She was telling Mrs. Van Ralten and several others, including myself—let me see, was it last night at the Casino?—that you were thinking of coming East; but I gathered she did not expect you till a few days later. I was mistaken, evidently."

"No. I am giving her a surprise. I managed to get away sooner than I expected, and the prospect of Newport's Atlantic breezes was so enticing that I just made a rush for the next train."

"Well, you are here, and the long journey is ended, a pleasant achievement in itself. Was the train accident a serious one?"

Willard supplied details, and his sympathetic hearer swapped reminiscences of a similar mishap on the Paris, Lyon et Mediterranée Railway. Incidentally, he wasted quarter of an hour before Willard could bring him back to the topic of the missing Power.

"Ah, yes—as to Power," nodded Dacre, seemingly recalling his questioner's errand. "Too bad you didn't turn up yesterday. Power is off to New York—made up his mind on the spur of the moment—and I rather fancy he will not be in Newport again this year. Indeed, I may go so far as to say I am sure he won't, because he has invited me to his place at Bison—somewhere near Denver, isn't it?—and I am to keep him posted as to my own movements, so that we can arrange things to our mutual convenience."

Willard laughed, intending merely to convey his sense of the absurdity of two men playing hide and seek across a continent; but Dacre's allusion to Bison brought a snarl into his mirth.

"You will write to the ranch, I suppose?" he inquired casually.

"Yes," said Dacre, knowing full well that he was being egged on to reveal any more immediate address he might have been given.

"Then I can only apologize for troubling you, and——"

"Not at all! What's your hurry? Let's adjourn to the veranda and smoke."

"I must go and see my daughter."

"Oh, fie, Mr. Willard! You, an old married man, proposing to break in on a lady's toilet at this hour!"

"My girl is up and dressed hours ago."

"Well, now that I come to think of it, you are right. Most mornings while Power was here he joined Mrs. Marten and others for a scamper across the island, and they were in the saddle by seven-thirty—never later."

In such conditions, being essentially a weak man, Willard was as a lump of modeler's clay in the hands of a skilled sculptor. He could not resist the notion of a cigar, he said; of course, it was easy to induce Dacre to gossip anent the lively doings of the Casino set. Ultimately, he entered a carriage at ten o'clock, whereat the Briton, watching his departure, smiled complacently.

"Heaven forgive me for aiding and abetting any man in running away with another man's wife," he communed. "But I know Derry and Nancy and Marten, and now I know Willard, and being a confirmed idiot, anyhow, I am mighty glad I was able to secure those young people a pretty useful hour and a quarter of uninterrupted travel. As we say in Newport, it should help some."

It had an effect which no one could have foreseen. It rendered Willard's arrival at "The Breakers" a possible thing had he reached Newport that morning, and thus, by idle chance, closed the mouth of scandal; for he positively reeled under the shock of the butler's open-mouthed statement that Mrs. Marten had left the town by the first train.

The man did not known him; but, being a well-trained servant, he made, as he thought, a shrewd guess at the truth.

"Surely you are not Mr. Willard, sir?" he said respectfully.

"Yes, I am." Simple words enough; yet their utterance demanded a tremendous effort.

"Ah, there has been some mistake, sir," came the ready theory. "Mrs. Marten meant to meet you in New York, and had arranged to travel by the nine o'clock train this morning; but Mr. Power made an early call—you know Mr. Power, sir?"

"Yes—yes."

"He seemed to have some information about you, sir, which caused Mrs. Marten to hurry away before seven. There has been a sad blunder, I'm sure. What a pity! But if you know what hotel Mrs. Marten will stay at, you can fix matters by a telegram within a couple of hours. . . . Aren't you well, sir? Can I get you anything? Some brandy?"

By some occult process of thought, Willard, though stupefied by rage and dread—for he never doubted for a second that Nancy had flown with Power—held fast to the one tangible idea that her household was ignorant, as yet, of the social tornado which had burst on Newport that morning. Could anything be done to avert its havoc? God! He must have time to recover his senses! While choking with passion, he must be dumb and secret as the grave! A false move now, the least slip of a tongue aching to rain curses on Power, and irretrievable mischief would be done. Small wonder, then, that the butler mistook his pallid fury for illness.

"Won't you come into the morning-room, and sit down, sir?" inquired the man sympathetically.

"Yes, take me anywhere—I'm dead beat. I've been traveling for days in this damned heat. . . . No! no brandy, thank you. A glass of water. Mrs. Marten expected me, you say?"

"Yes, sir—at New York."

"Ah, my fault—entirely my fault. I misled her, not purposely, of course. She gave you no address?"

"No, sir. Said she would write in a few days, perhaps within a week; but she imagined your movements were uncertain, and she could decide nothing till she had seen you."

"Ah, the devil take it, my fault! I ought to have telegraphed."

He harped on this string as promising some measure of safety for the hour. By this time he was seated, and ostensibly sipping iced water, while his frenzied brain was striving to find an excuse to encourage the man to talk.

"Perhaps Mrs. Marten may return when she discovers her mistake," he contrived to say with some show of calmness.

"Well, sir, that may happen, of course. My mistress did not take any large supply of clothing, and left her maid here; so, when she misses you in New York, she will probably wire for Julie, at any rate."

"Julie?"

"The French maid, sir."

"What time did Mr. Power call?"

"Very early, sir. About six o'clock."

Willard was slowly gaining a semblance of self-control. He realized that he had been checkmated in some inexplicable way; but it was imperative that

Power's interference should not give ground for suspicion.

"I am beginning to grasp the situation now," he said, forcing a ghastly smile. "Mr. Power heard of the accident to my train—it was derailed late last night—and, fearing lest I might be injured, he hurried Mrs. Marten away without telling her."

"Then you came by way of New York, sir?"

"Yes. We were held up near Groton."

"Pity you didn't come by the Fall River steamer, sir. Then you would have caught Mrs. Marten, as the boat arrives here at a quarter of four in the morning."

Willard wanted badly to swear at the well-meaning butler. He had chosen the train purposely in order to be in Newport the previous night, and his own haste had proved his undoing. Why should this fat menial put an unerring finger on the one weak spot in his calculations?

But he felt the urgent need for action, and he was only losing time now, as it was evident that Nancy had covered her tracks dexterously where her servants were concerned.

"Is that cab still waiting?" he demanded suddenly.

"Yes, sir. I didn't notice any baggage. Shall I——"

"I don't intend to remain. I'll telegraph to New York, and go there by tonight's steamer. Meanwhile, I have some friends at the Ocean House whom I would like to look up. By the way, don't mention to anyone that I am upset by my daughter's absence. It might come to Mrs. Marten's ears, and she would be unnec-

essarily worried. My heart is slightly affected—you understand?"

The butler understood perfectly. He could be trusted not to cause Mrs. Marten any uneasiness.

Then Willard set out on the trail of the runaways, following it with a grim purpose not to be balked by repeated failure. At the station he had little difficulty in learning that a lady and gentleman—lady young and good-looking, gentleman who walked with a limp—had taken tickets for Boston. He was in Boston within three hours; but Power had broken the line there to such good purpose that the scent failed, for he had caused Nancy to go alone on a shopping expedition, and purchase her own ticket for Burlington, and, when he joined her in a parlor car, the fact that they were traveling in company was by no means published to all the world.

So Willard returned to Newport, removed his baggage from the Ocean House—for some inscrutable reason he distrusted Dacre's smiling *bonhomie*—and occupied quarters in a less important hotel. Changing his name, by the simple expedient of ordering a supply of visiting cards, he called on the horse-breeding judge, who could facilitate his seemingly eager quest for Power only by telling him to send a letter to the care of a New York bank. This was something gained, and he hurried to New York, where, of course, he was suavely directed to write, and the letter would be forwarded.

Driven to his wits' end after a week of furtive visits to restaurants, on the off chance that the fugitives might really be in the metropolitan city, he employed

a private inquiry agent, and, five days later, received the first definite news. A "Mr. and Mrs. Darien Power" had registered at the Lake Champlain Hotel on the evening of the day of Nancy's flight, and had gone into the Adirondacks next morning!

On the principle that it never rains but it pours, quick on the heels of this startling intelligence came a letter from Nancy. It had been sent to Denver, and some bungle in readdressing it had caused a prolonged delay. It was brief and to the point, and had been posted at Boston.

"My dear Father [she wrote].—It will cause you much distress, but not any real surprise, to hear that I have decided to dissolve my marriage with Mr. Marten. I have met Derry Power, and now I know just what happened at Bison when you forced me to marry a man whom I detested. I forgive you your share in that horrible deceit; but I cannot forgive Marten, and the action I am taking renders it impossible that he and I should ever meet again. You will learn the why and the wherefore in due course. Meanwhile, I hope you will not take this thing too deeply to heart, and I look forward to our reunion in more peaceful days. When the divorce proceedings are ended, and Derry and I are married, I shall tell you where to find me. By that time, perhaps, you will have decided to accept the inevitable, and let the past be forgotten. I am well, and happy—very, very happy.

"Your loving,

"Nancy."

Willard brooded long over this straightforward message. He was blind and deaf to its gentle reproach,

finding in it only a confirmation of his worst fears. There was no need now to map out a course of action; he had limned that in the main before leaving Newport. Vengeance on Power, vengeance ample and complete, was what he craved for. He understood, in some furtive and perverted way, that he could not strike a mortal blow at a man of Power's temperament by using the bludgeons of the law to expiate an offense against society. Both Nancy and her lover must have discounted the effect of the social pillory before they transgressed its code beyond redemption. Indeed, they would hail with joy the edict which banned them—be it proclaimed from the housetops and carried round the earth by the myriad-tongued press! Nancy's letter, too, showed that she would not scruple to make known her defense, and Willard was well aware that it would serve to rehabilitate her in the eyes of her friends.

So he had devised a ghoulish and crafty punishment, which, the more he pondered it, the more subtle and effective did it appear. As the scheme grew in his imagination, he almost hugged himself in rapturous approval of it. So warped was his mind that he might have discovered, were he capable of making an honest analysis of motives, that he was actually gloating over the position in which his daughter was placed if only because of the weapon it placed in his hands against Power.

To succeed, two conditions were necessary—Power must not have written to his mother, nor Nancy to her husband. To his thinking, neither of these eventualities was likely. The very environment of the woods

and lakes of the Adirondacks forbade the notion. If he was right, he would turn Power's dream of happiness into bitterest gall; if wrong, there was still another alternative, deadlier, more lurid, but far from being so attractive to a mean and rather cowardly nature. Time alone would show which project promised success—to fail in both was nearly, if not quite, impossible.

Meanwhile, no painted Indian ever camped on the trail of unsuspecting pioneer with more malign intent and rancorous tenacity than Willard displayed in his pursuit and tracking of the erring pair. He was not a righteously incensed father, but a disappointed man who saw within his grasp the means of glutting the stored malice of years. To appreciate to the full Willard's mental processes at this period of his life, not only his double-dealing in the matter of Nancy's marriage, but his vain longings for the lost wealth of the Dolores Ranch, must be taken into account. Even then, his apologist might plead an obsession mounting almost to insanity. Nothing else would explain his actions; but no words could palliate them, for the ruthless Pawnee he resembled would assuredly have chosen a less ignoble revenge.

CHAPTER X

NANCY DECIDES

A LONG spur of the Adirondack Mountains stretches across Hamilton County from northeast to southwest. In a hollow on the western slopes of the range nestles Forked Lake. Some five or six miles nearer the watershed, and some hundreds of feet higher in altitude, lies a smaller and prettier lake, difficult of access, and far from the beaten track of tourists. Hither, by devious paths, Power had brought Nancy. A guide, hired at Elizabethtown, was enthusiastic about the fishing in that particular sheet of water, and he vouched for it that there was quarry in plenty for gun as well as rod; moreover, attracted by the sport and scenery, he had built a hut on the unfrequented side of the lake, in which were stored a sufficiency of rough furniture, some cooking utensils, and a canoe. Given fine weather and good health, what more did anyone want?

"Let us go there at once, Derry," said Nancy. "A cabin among trees on the shore of a lake has always been my dream."

"It sounds almost too idyllic," said Power, trying to be cynical; "but we'll hire the outfit for a week, and move on to the next caravan in a day if we don't like it."

They arrived at night, in a drenching downpour

of rain, the outcome of the first and only thunderstorm of the season, and were inclined consequently to view with critical eyes the accommodation at their disposal. The owner of the property, who also owned a peculiar name, Peter Granite, had gone to a wood hutch for dry fuel, and Power divested Nancy of a dripping waterproof; while Peter's dog, a nondescript of the hound type, known as "Guess," shook his shaggy fur noisily.

"'Peter' and 'Granite' each signifies 'rock,'" he whispered; "but Guess seems to be of opinion that we are stranded in a swamp." Incidentally, he kissed her.

"Hush! I have faith in Peter. He told me today that some famous author came here every summer till he died; so the place must have a charm of its own.

"Perhaps the famous author was a detached soul; in other words, a queer fish."

"And perhaps you'll get that wet coat off, and make yourself useful. Please strike a match. If it were not for Guess, I should be sure that something was going to leap out of the dark and grab me."

So Nancy was admittedly a trifle nervous; but the feeling passed at once when Granite had a fire roaring in a stove, and an oil lamp was swinging from a hook, and the cabin was filled with warmth, and the grateful scent of a stew mixed with the steam of drying dog and garments. The sleeping arrangements were so primitive, however, that Nancy dared not undress. Every inch of the tiny bedroom was lit by lightning almost incessantly, and the constant dripping of water from the roof, added to the howling and whistling of the wind, kept her and Power awake till

long after midnight. They would have risen and gone back to the more comfortable living-room, where the stove might have induced drowsiness, and Power could smoke, at least, but certain regular sounds from that quarter revealed that Granite cared little for the storm, was even expressing his unconscious contempt for it audibly; while Guess had met some lifelong foe in his dreams and was fighting a Homeric battle.

To while away the slow-moving hours, and perchance close their senses to the external uproar, the lovers talked, or, rather, Nancy talked and Power listened. A casual reference to some such wild night in France led the girl to discourse of her Parisian friends, and she gave full play to a ready wit and gift of close yet kindly and humorous observation which, in different conditions, would certainly have won her a place among contemporary writers on French life and manners. American ways and habits of thought owe so much to the Gallic leaven introduced at the beginning of the eighteenth century that a modern American woman assimilates French ideas with more ease and surer touch than her British sister; so Nancy would have brought to the task both racial sympathy and natural equipment. She knew Daudet and Turgenieff—had been present at one of their famous quarrels—and her description of the Russian's unbridled fury and the Frenchman's ironic good temper caused the scene to live again. She spoke French fluently, had even gleaned some scraps of Russian, and Power found himself transported in imagination to the brilliant salons where litterateurs like Zola and Coppée bickered, where artists like Rodin and Bonnat founded schools, where

Massenet played snatches of operas yet to reach the ear of a wider world, where the men and women who occupied the stage in the Dreyfus drama were already stabbing reputations with poison-tipped epigrams.

Often she brought laughter to his lips; as, for instance, when she spoke of the beautiful and fascinating wife of a struggling artist, a lady notorious in many walks of life, who attended a fancy-dress ball at the American Embassy. "Ah," said someone to the Duchesse de Brasnes, "here comes the latest star, gotten up appropriately as Madame Récamier!" "No," chirped the witty old lady instantly. "You have given her the wrong name. You mean Madame Réclâmier!"

Luckily, Power's acquaintance with the French language was close enough to enable him to appreciate the caustic humor of the words. He was far too absorbed then in the girl's vivid impressions of personalities familiar to him only in the columns of newspapers to indulge in speculation as to the why and the wherefore of this flow of anecdote and quaintly analytical glimpses of character. But he understood later. During three long years she had existed in an atmosphere that checked every natural impulse. She had become a statue, beautiful but impassive. Now she was once more a woman. The marble was coming to life. Love had breathed on her, and the red blood was flowing freely in her veins.

He could have listened till dawn; but the sweet voice suddenly grew husky, and she expressed a desire to rest.

"Derry," she said, with the unthinking confidence

of a tired child, "let me lean my head on your shoulder. With your arm around me, I do believe I can forget even this dreadful lightning."

Within a minute she was asleep. She merely smiled and murmured something about "putting the light out" when he laid her gently in a roughly carpentered but fairly comfortable bunk, and covered her with a rug. Then he, too, after a brief vigil to assure himself that she would not waken, stretched himself in the second bunk.

When next they opened their eyes the sun was shining from a cloudless sky, and Peter was shouting that they just had time to dip their hands and faces in the lake before the "cawfee kem to a bile."

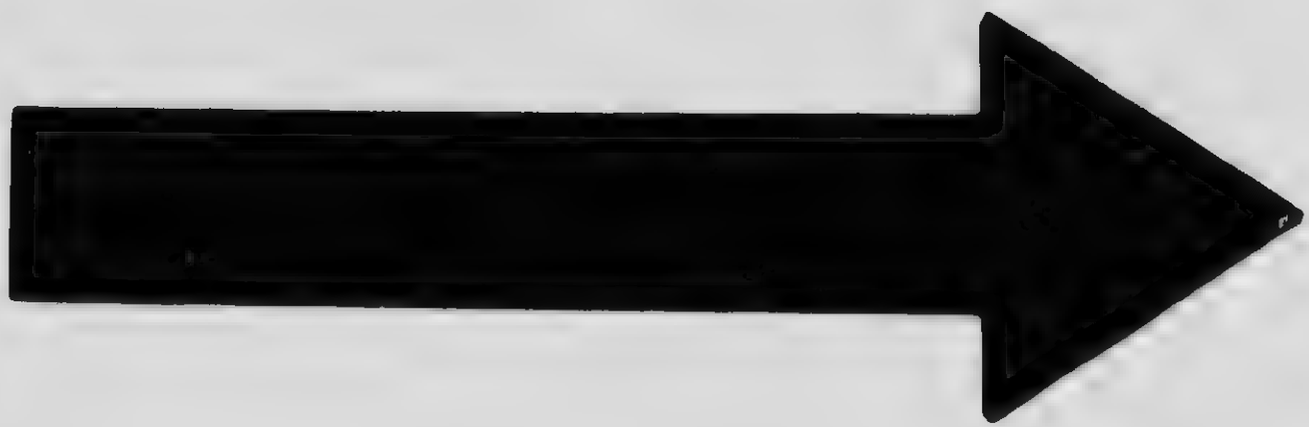
They were out in a jiffy, and found themselves in a fairyland. On the one hand, green and blue mountains rose in an almost unscalable rampart; on the other, across two miles of a silvery mirror ordinarily a lake, a wooded landscape fell away in gorgeous tints and ineffable distances. The song of birds trilled in the air, and the fresh, keen scent of the rain-washed pines was pungent in their nostrils. After one delighted glance at this circumambient Paradise, they raced to the water, and, as they ran, Nancy noticed the phenomenally clean-cut reflection of the opposite shore.

"Derry," she cried, "just look at that picture! Can you wonder if I hardly know whether I am standing on my head or my heels?"

Perhaps, of all the tender memories which Power has hoarded through the years, he is most tenacious of his recollection of Nancy as she was that morning.

She seemed some wood-nymph clothed in the garments of civilization, that modern cult which the Greeks, those true poets and clear thinkers, would have scoffed at. Yet, so graceful were her movements, so bewitching her mobile face, so artistic the careless knot into which she had twisted her wealth of nut-brown hair, that not even the Boston tailor of a bygone generation who had equipped her at sight with a fawn-colored coat and skirt could hide the symmetry of her form or impair her winsome beauty.

The lake was oval in shape, and an imaginary line drawn from shore to shore at its center would measure more than a mile. The hut stood half a mile north of the eastern end of this line, and a summer hotel, patronized mostly by zealots of rod and hook, lay half a mile south of it on the opposite side. Thus, except on the rare occasions when a fishing canoe came that way—and the water was so alive with fish that the requisite paddling meant so much wasted time and effort—they were absolutely shut off from the world. Even while they were scampering to the spot where they had landed the night before, Power was noting a tree-shrouded creek where a tiny stream from the hills babbled the last of its brief life into the placid bosom of the lake. There, he decided, it would be easy to contrive an admirable bathing-place for Nancy, as she was only a timid swimmer, having acquired the art quite recently. He himself was equally at home in sea, river, and lake. On one occasion, during his engineering novitiate, he had swum across the Arkansas River when it was almost at flood level, and it needs those who have seen and heard that turbulent stream



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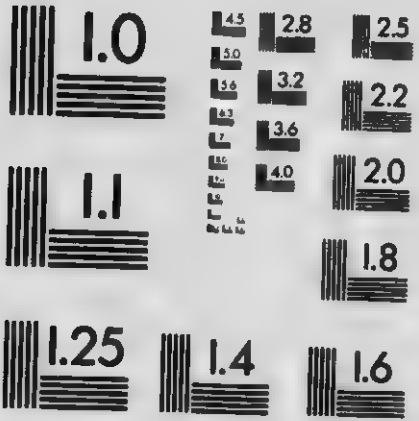

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roaring through its rocky canyons between Pueblo and Las Animas to appreciate the feat at its true worth.

Then he would teach her how to fish and shoot; for they must be self-supporting to a large extent, though the hotel provided a well-equipped base for this foray into the wilds of the Adirondacks. Yes, they would have a glorious time, living like Indians, yet tempering their savagery by the sweet communion of kindred souls, with never a newspaper nearer than the hotel, their address a tangle of wooded mountains, and their solitary book a copy of Milton's poems, which, Nancy had said once in Newport, she had never appreciated properly, and which Power, an enthusiast, had recommended to her close study as the well of English, pure and undefiled.

Nor was their earliest day-dream any fantasy, or other than a superficial glimpse of delights which expanded hourly before their enraptured vision. A whole fortnight slipped away so rapidly in this Elysium that Nancy, keeping a housewifely eye on stores, discovered the flight of time only by the urgent need of replenishing a cupboard bare of coffee, and sugar, and bacon, and other essentials, notably matches; for the summer camp has yet to be built in which the supply of matches has endured to the end.

Usually, when a visit to the hotel became necessary, Peter Granite took the canoe, while Derry and Nancy, escorted by Guess, rambled off for the day into the hills behind the hut. They had no fear of getting lost, because Power was endowed with a sixth sense in all matters pertaining to topography, while the dog was credited by his master with an infallible knowl-

edge of the homeward way at dinnertime. But on this day, by unhappy chance, Nancy announced that she wanted the cabin clear of men while she indulged in a feminine foible, common to all her sex, known as spring cleaning. Season or clime is immaterial; when that microbe seizes a woman she has to undergo the disease from the earliest symptoms to complete convalescence. The premonitory signs are unmistakable. She begins by a ruthless survey of corners, floors, spidery rafters, and grimy windows. Her eyes sparkle, she turns up the sleeves of her blouse, dons an apron, and arranges for unlimited quantities of hot water and soap. Nancy possessed no apron; but a square of sacking and some cord soon settled that difficulty.

Therefore, deeming themselves wise, Derry and Peter fled, leaving the dog and a double-barreled shotgun as safeguards. Not that any sort of protection was needed in that favored region. The predatory tramp cannot exist there; the inhabitants are the most courteous and law-abiding people in America; the only strangers are city holiday-makers of the quiet and cultured type.

The men promised to remain away two hours. Considering the time altogether too short for the thorough cleansing of the hut, Nancy set to work with a will, and when first she thought of glancing at her watch she found that one hour had sped already. Guess was sitting in the sun, blinking lazily at a beetle which had been disturbed, and was now scuttling away for dear life. Possibly the dog was wondering why uneasy mortals should not rest when not hunting; but, de-

spite his canine philosophy, he was keeping watch and ward with due vigilance, for he rose suddenly, and growled.

Nancy knew that he hardly ever barked; but his growl was an unfailing indication of the near presence of some intruder; whether man or animal remained to be seen. An occasional wolf, and a species of small black bear—the latter very scarce—were the only dangerous creatures which could possibly come near the cabin, and then only by accident; so Nancy was merely obeying Peter's behests in picking up the gun, and making sure that both barrels were loaded, before going to investigate the cause of the dog's uneasiness. Out of the tail of her eye she noted that he had stalked away deliberately toward the back of the cabin. Whatever it was that had disturbed his siesta, he was still bidding it defiance; so she hurried somewhat, and, the morning sun being in her eyes, saw, without instant recognition, a man of small stature standing motionless some yards away among the undergrowth.

Then a well-remembered voice chilled her heart with terror; for her father cried angrily:

"Call that brute off! He looks like flying at my throat!"

During a few seconds of icy fear and foreboding she could neither move nor speak. The dog, quick to learn that this stranger was unwelcome, snarled with louder menace, and the fur rose along his spine.

"Do you hear?" shouted Willard, now thoroughly alarmed. "Do you want me to shoot him?"

"Down, Guess!" she contrived to say, in a queer falsetto; for her tongue seemed palsied, and her throat

had gone dry. But the mechanical effort at speech served to restore her faculties, and she continued more naturally:

"You startled both Guess and myself, Father. The dog will not hurt you. Use his name—Guess. Then he will wag his tail and make friends."

Guess, however, belied this good character. He allowed Willard to approach; but eyed him with covert suspicion. In her panic of distress and apprehension the girl had forgotten that her father was one of that small company of human beings who dislike dogs, and whose antipathy is returned in double measure by the animal which, above all others, is regarded as the friend of man. Still, Guess obeyed orders, with reservations, and contented himself by displaying an alert watchfulness widely at variance with his earlier state of dignified repose.

"Of course, you know why I am here?" began Willard, smiling complacently. Nancy's evident agitation put him at once in a superior position, and his mean soul rejoiced in the fact; for it was he who should be afraid, and not his daughter.

"No," she faltered, turning her frightened eyes toward the lake.

Oh, if Derry would only come back sooner than he had promised! She half formed a desperate resolve to fire both barrels of the gun, and thus summon him with all speed, because the reports would be heard easily across that mile and a half of placid water.

"I've come to take you away," said the harsh voice at her shoulder. "I got your letter, and managed

to find out where you were hiding. Now you must come with me, straight away, do you understand?"

The sheer absurdity of his querulous words helped to stem the rising flood of agony which threatened to overwhelm her; for at that moment she was nearer to fainting than she had ever been before.

"You had better have stayed away than come here in anger and ask a thing that is impossible," she said.

"Impossible! Nothing is impossible—to a woman. Your husband knows nothing of your conduct. No one in the world knows, except myself."

If Nancy were not quite distraught and bereft of her quick intelligence, she would have detected a note of breathless questioning and doubt in that confident assertion. Willard could not be certain that neither she nor Power had written to Marten; he had staked all, or nearly all, on ascertaining the fact during the first outburst of talk, while the girl was still quaking with fright at his unexpected appearance. He was well aware of her courage and adroitness. When she regained self-control—a matter of a minute or less—she might be clear-sighted enough to grasp the paramount importance of the admission that she had not as yet placed an insuperable barrier between herself and the man she had cast off. Once alive to its vital significance, he thought, she would either deceive him deliberately, and take the earliest opportunity of rectifying an error in strategy, or, at any rate, keep him in ignorance of the exact position of affairs. Unhappily, he counted well. Nancy was far too dismayed by his presence to pay heed to tricks and turns of speech.

"Father," she said brokenly, "I have so much to endure that you, for one, should spare me your taunts."

"I'm not taunting you," he urged. "I want to save you from yourself. By a stroke of good luck I was able to make it appear that you and I missed each other in Newport, owing to a railroad accident. Your friends on the island believe you are with me in New York. If we were to arrive at Newport tomorrow, not a living soul, except me, would know what has happened. I shall be dumb, you may well believe, and I suppose your—this fellow Power—will hold his tongue? Surely he is man enough for that!"

Beneath the brown of sun and air, Nancy's forehead and cheeks had assumed the pallor of *camaïeu gris*, that wan tint with which the monkish illuminators of missals were wont to depict the sufferings of martyrs; but they now flushed with the red stain of unflinching resolve, for her father's loathsome suggestions aroused all that was high-minded and virile in her character.

She withdrew a pace, and threw the gun across her body as though to protect herself from an assassin's knife.

"How can you so demean yourself?" she cried hysterically. "Go away, and never let us meet again until you have taught yourself to think decently! Return to Hugh Marten now? Leave the man I love, and act the part of a faithful wife to one whom I hate? Even Marten, bad as he is, would shudder at the thought if he could hear you utter it!"

Willard smiled again in ghastly humor. At least,

there was one obstacle the less. She had not written! But his ill-timed mirth changed quickly to a snarl; for Guess had interpreted this angry scene in his own way, and was ready to begin a fray already postponed unduly.

"Can't you beat off this damned dog?" came the cry. "Let us go into the house, and tell the cur to stop outside."

Once again was Nancy prompted to fire the signal that would bring Power in hot haste to her side; but she repressed the notion, deeming herself calmer now, more assured, more confident in the justice of her cause and her ability to set it forth convincingly. Indeed, her bewildered brain was actively at work already devising means whereby Derry and her father should be kept apart. She did not want them to quarrel beyond redemption. Time, she hoped and believed, would assuage present bitterness, and, if the gods were kind, the coming years might find the older man in a mood to yield to other claims on his forgiveness.

"Lie down, Guess!" she said, patting the dog's head. "Just curl up there in the sun. Yes, that's a dear! Lie down!"

Guess did not curl up; but stretched himself on the grass in front of the door, resting his head between his paws, and keeping a pair of particularly bright eyes fixed on Willard. He would have treated a tame snake or a performing bear in much the same way, if so bidden by someone whom he trusted.

Father and daughter entered the cabin, which was all of a jumble owing to the cleansing operations. Nancy unloaded the gun—why, she hardly knew, be-

cause that was the first thing Derry would attend to when he returned. Placing the weapon on the table, she essayed a forlorn smile at the disorder the place was in.

"Derry and Peter have gone to the hotel for stores," she said, "and I took the opportunity to tidy our small castle."

"I saw them crossing the lake," said Willard. "I have been waiting two days for the chance that offered this morning. You see, Nancy, you and I had to thresh out matters between our two selves. When all is said and done, the future concerns us far more than any other person."

Nancy looked across the lake. There was no sign of the canoe, and she was glad of it.

"Now, Dad," she said, tuning her utterance to a softer key in valiant endeavor to place their relations on a friendly footing, "I hope you will try and think less harshly of Derry and me. What is done cannot be undone——"

"It can be put straight, which is the next best thing," broke in Willard fiercely. "I'm not here to listen to *your* plans; but you must listen to *mine!* I have no time to lose, nor have you; so I'll put my meaning in the plainest words possible, and I'll thank you not to interrupt me. I'm not going to lecture you on morality, and that sort of thing—that's not my business. I have followed you with one object, and one only, and that is to take you back to your husband. Don't try to shut me up!" he almost screamed; for Nancy's indignation had crimsoned her face and neck again. "You've got to hear what I have to say,

and it must be here and now. You'll know why when I have finished. I've thought this wretched affair through from A to Z, and *my* way has to be *your* way —unless you prefer the alternative. You either come with me now, this instant, and promise not to leave me until I hand you over to your husband, or I shall shoot Power at sight. That is my offer. Take it or leave it. I give you your fancy man's life in exchange for your obedience. Refuse, and I fill him full of lead. I'm running no bluff on you. I mean just what I am saying. I am not even taking any great risk, because there isn't a jury in America that would convict a father for killing the man who betrayed his daughter while her husband's back was turned. The dirty hound! I've got both him and you in a tight place, and now you're going to suffer, each of you. Condemn him to death if you like. I don't care a red cent which way your choice goes. But, if you want him to live, you must return to Marten, and be his good and loving wife once more. No, you gain nothing by shrinking away in horror at the notion. Nor will death serve your ends, since a silly woman would think little of giving her life to save her lover. You have my full and complete terms, no less, in exchange for Power's life. It won't save him if you agree to come away with me and throw yourself overboard before our steamer reaches Europe. That will mean simply that I take the next boat west, and kill Power. My plea still holds good. I am prepared to face any court with the proofs of my story. But I can't waste any more time. Which is it to be—go or stay—give Power his life or take it? If you want to please me, which is

about the last thing you would think of, refuse to come with me, because I am aching to empty these into his rotten carcass."

Nancy had shrunk from his growing frenzy no less than from his monstrous decree; but her dilated eyes were fixed on his, utterly regardless of the brace of heavy-caliber revolvers he had produced, apparently to lend a theatrical effect to his words. In truth, the man had no such thought in his mind. He was beyond the reach of any impulse of that sort. His maniacal fury was real enough to convince the most skeptical that he fully intended every word of that murderous threat. Nor did the distracted girl harbor any doubt on that score. Suddenly, awfully, she had been scourged to the verge of a precipice, and it was borne in on her she had no option but to make the heartrending decision which the man whom she had once loved as a father was forcing on her.

Her very lips blanched, and she gazed at Willard with all the hatred and passionate scorn of a woman wronged beyond redress.

"You—you—" she gasped incoherently, "you are not God! It is God alone who wields such power over men and women. He, and He only, may pronounce a decree of life or death against those who have sinned—not you, a man who sold his own daughter for money!"

"Power told you that, did he? The story came well from the mouth of the cheat who robbed me of my property."

"But that is a lie. Why demean yourself by uttering such a plea?"

"We can argue the rights and wrongs of the matter some other time. Are you coming with me, or not?"

"No, a thousand times no!" she almost shrieked.

Willard repocketed the pistols, and turned to leave the hut. "That's right!" he chuckled sardonically. "I'd as soon have it that way as the other."

Nancy was quite beside herself with agony, or she would never have snatched up the gun and held it pointblank at his back.

"Stop!" she screamed. "Stop, or I vow to Heaven I'll fire!"

He faced her again, and his frenzy was comparable only with that of the distracted girl who threatened him.

"If you want to shoot me you must reload your gun," he said, and his face grew livid, though not with fright. "Do you imagine that an old man like me fears death? Shoot, I tell you, and see if my last curse does not part you and Power. Test his love by telling him you are a murderess—that you have killed your own father. Ask him to help in hiding my body, and then cower in hourly terror, both of you, till a New York bank sends to my lawyer the letter I have left in its charge. Shoot me now, and I'll die happy in the knowledge that Power and you will be tried for my murder."

She dropped the gun, and burst into a tempest of weeping; but her tears seemed but to harden Willard into an even more callous and determined mood.

"Don't you forget that I am watching for the coming of that canoe," he said, sinking his voice to a note

of sinister meaning. "If Power and I meet, nothing that you can do will save him. It is possible, of course, that he may avoid me this time. You can scream a warning, and he may, or may not, skulk out of range. But, as sure as there is a sun shining in the sky, so surely will I follow and kill him. Each moment you hesitate brings him nearer the grave. You can save him, if you like; but you must buy his life on my terms, now. It will be too late in a few minutes."

She threw herself on her knees, and raised her swimming eyes in humblest pleading.

"Father, think what you are doing!" she sobbed, clutching at his hands in a heartbroken way. "I am your own little daughter, the girl you used to be so proud of, the girl who once loved you dearly, and who is ready to forget the past and love you again. You would not condemn me to the degraded life of a woman who loathes and has been unfaithful to her husband, and yet permits him to regard her as his wife? I may be the meanest of God's creatures in your sight; but you are asking me to act as no decent-minded woman can act, and live. Ah, no! Do not speak yet! Listen, I implore you! God give me words to touch your heart! Have you blotted from your mind all recollection of our long years together on the ranch? Does it count for nothing that I rejoiced with you when times were good, and sorrowed with you when misfortunes came? Have you forgotten my mother? Ah, dear Heaven, my mother! You loved her, did you not? You have said you loved me, not alone for my own sake, but because I reminded you of her. She, at least,

was good and pure, and perhaps her spirit is with us now, grieving for my sin, it may be, but surely not content with the dreadful lot you would impose on one who is your child and hers. Oh, father dear, do not turn away from me! Is there nothing I can promise that will soften your heart? I will leave Derry. Yes, I swear it! To save him, and you, I'll go away and never see him again, writing him some cruel lie in order to assuage his misery; but you shall not, you must not, make my return to Hugh Marten the price of my obedience to your will!"

Willard wrenched himself free, and took a sheet of notepaper, an envelop, and a pencil from a pocket. He placed them on the rough table, and stood in the doorway, watching the sunlit lake. His expression was dour, implacable, malignant in its ferocious joy; for he held Power in the hollow of his hand, and would relinquish naught of his vengeful scheme.

"I'm glad to see you are convinced that I mean what I have said," he announced, speaking in a cold, balanced way that Nancy knew of old, and recognized now as sounding the knell of her hopes. "Unless I am mistaken, the canoe is putting off from the hotel. It will be here in twenty minutes. You have just five minutes to make up your mind, and to write a farewell message to Power. I don't care what you say to him, so long as the break is final. You are going with me to Newport, and straight from there to London, where Marten will join us in response to a cablegram from me, telling him that you are ill. You had better stop crying. Nothing that you can say or do, short of loading that gun again and blowing a hole in me, will

change either my purpose or my terms. I'll keep my word with regard to Power if you keep yours where Marten is concerned. He must never know. He must never see any change in you. The moment he casts you off because of Power, and I am still alive, you sign Power's death-warrant."

Nancy rose. She was deathly white, and the tears still coursed silently down her cheeks; but despair had benumbed her emotions, and she spoke calmly.

"You are sentencing me to death," she said.

"Am I? Then Power dies, too," he cried.

"No. That is not in the bond. You stipulate that I shall return to Marten as his wife, and that I am not to take my own life. But if my heart breaks, and I die, you will have glutted your bitter malice already, and Derry, too, must not provide you with a victim."

"People don't die of broken hearts."

"Every woman who has loved will think differently. But you have some notion of what is meant by honor, I suppose? I demand your promise that if I accompany you now, and go back to Marten, and never attempt to meet Derry again—though that would be quite impossible, either for him or for me—you withdraw your threat, and leave him in peace during the remainder of your life."

"I'm not here to receive terms, but to state them."

"Then he and I will fall together beneath your bullets. Before you shoot him, you will have to shoot me."

"Very well, then. I agree. I don't want to kill my own daughter."

"You have done that already. You have slain her

soul, and her poor body is of slight importance. Ah, may Heaven forgive me if I am not choosing aright! Derry, my own dear love, you must never know that I am doing this for your sake, or it will not be the wretch whom once I called father who becomes judge and jury and executioner in my behalf!"

Willard, still turned toward the lake, heard her drop on her knees again beside the table. She wrote a few words, very few; for her dazed brain was incapable now of framing other than the simplest sentences. Then she sealed the envelop, and kissed it, and went out. Brushing the tears from her eyes, she gave one long look across the shimmering water, and saw a black dot which she knew was the canoe heading straight for the cabin.

"Ah, dear God!" she sighed, pressing her clenched hands to her breast.

The storm passed as quickly as it had arisen. She stooped, patted the dog, and bade him remain there on guard. Then, without ever a glance at Willard, she said:

"I have made my choice. I am ready!"

CHAPTER XI

POWER'S HOME-COMING

It chanced that Peter Granite occupied the fore part of the canoe; consequently, great as was the distance, he saw Willard and Nancy leaving the hut and disappearing among the trees. He tossed a question over his shoulder.

"You hain't been expectin' anyone, kev you?" he demanded.

"How do you mean?"

"I've a sort o' notion Mrs. Power has just quit, with a man."

"Are you sure?"

"Yep."

"Someone must have happened on the cabin. Perhaps she is showing him the road to the divide. Was the dog with her?"

"I hain't seen Guess; but a mile an' a half across this yer shinin' water is a long ways ter spot a dawg."

"Oh, well, there's nothing to worry about. We don't quite own the earth; though one might come to think along that line after living here a spell."

Nothing more was said; but both men plied their paddles with strong, sweeping strokes that drove the canoe onward at a rare pace. When she grounded, Power sprang ashore, and did not wait, as was his wont, to help with the packages. Already he felt anxious,

because Nancy had not appeared in or about the hut, and the dog was now plainly visible, lying in front of the open door.

"Nancy!" he shouted.

There was no answer; but Guess rose, yawned, and stretched his limbs, his vigil being ended. Power shouted again, more loudly, and Granite, having drawn the canoe high and dry, joined him, leaving the unloading of the provisions until a less troubled moment.

"It ain't jest like Mrs. Power not ter be within hail," said the guide. "Hurry up to the shack, Mr. Power, an' put Guess on her trail if she ain't havin' a snooze in the back room."

"She wouldn't be asleep at this hour. And you saw her, you said?"

"I might ha been mistook. My eyes ain't so good as they was."

Power broke into a run, and Granite followed slowly, those keen eyes of his, which ill-deserved the charge he had levied against them, searching the trees and the broken ground behind the hut for some sign of the two people whom he had undoubtedly observed.

With one last cry of "Nancy!" Power hurried past the dog, who was greeting him with tail-wagging and a rumbling growl which meant, "I'm glad you've come back, but why didn't you come sooner?" He peered through the doorway into the room beyond, and his glance fell on the note, resting on the table beside the gun.

"Oh, it's all right," he announced, in a tone of vast relief. "Someone has called her away, and here is the explanation."

Meanwhile, the dog was obviously inviting his master to a scouting expedition among the trees and brushwood to the left of the cabin's front, and Granite was so puzzled by the animal's behavior that he paid no heed to Power during the next few seconds; moreover, the fact that Nancy had left a written message showed that, although something unusual might have occurred, it was not necessarily alarming. Then he heard a queer sort of sob, or groan, and, glancing at Power, saw that in his face which brought a dismayed question to his own lips.

"God A'mighty, Mr. Power, what's got ye?" he cried.

Power made no reply. He seemed as though stricken with a palsy. He absolutely reeled, and would have tumbled headlong had he not, by chance, staggered back against the jamb of the door. Granite caught him by the arm lest he should fall, and Nancy's letter dropped from his nerveless fingers, and fluttered to the ground.

"Don't give way like that," urged the guide. "She ain't dead, anyhow. Has she left you bad news?"

Power looked at the man as though he did not recognize him. A baleful light gleamed in his eyes. Had Willard been present then, it was not he who would have been the slayer, unless he contrived to be extraordinarily quick with his weapons.

"She has gone," he said, in the monotone of tragedy; for there are moments in life when the voice loses its flexible notes, and mere speech becomes a mechanical effort.

"Gone?" echoed Granite. "Wall, I allow she'll come back?"

"No, she has left me forever. She says so."

"What, in that theer bit o' writin'?"

"Yes."

"Mr. Power, air you joshin' me, er what?"

Power drew a deep breath. The dizziness which had benumbed his faculties was passing, and fortunately so; for his sympathetic companion, despairing of obtaining any lucid statement from this dazed man, was stooping to pick up the letter.

"No," he managed to say. "You must not read that. It is meant for me alone. But give it to me. I—I am afraid of falling. My head——"

Vastly puzzled, the guide handed him the half-folded sheet of paper. The bald explanation that Mrs. Power had "left" her husband "forever" sounded like the wildest variety of moon-madness. In Granite's own phrase, he had never before clapped eyes on two sich genuwine love-birds as Nancy and Derry, not in all his born nateral, and to be told that one had deserted the other merely went to prove that the speaker had gone plumb crazy. For a time, indeed, he was convinced that Power was suffering from a slight sunstroke, because they had paddled nearly two miles while facing the sun, whose rays were reflected in a glowing path on the surface of the lake. Such attacks, though infrequent, were not unknown in that high region. When reaction set in, and Mrs. Power returned, the patient would become violently sick, and a few hours of complete rest would complete his cure.

"Jest go right inside an' set yerself daown," he

said cheerfully. "Me an' the dawg 'll git on Madam's trail in a brace o' shakes. We'll bring her back, you bet, an' ef you kinder feel as though you'd swallered a live rabbit, wall, let it bolt!"

Power uttered no protest. If he was capable of any definite sensation, it was one of relief that the friendly guide meant to leave him alone. He stumbled into the hut, and collapsed on a chair, burying his face in his hands. He heard Peter's lively command to the dog, "After her, Guess! Hark to it, Pup! Keep yer nose to the ground, an' I'll do the rest," as if the man's voice and the eager whimpering of the hound had traveled through a long tunnel before reaching his ears. The sounds of the chase soon died away among the trees. A great silence fell, and seemed to wrap him in a pall that would never unfold again. Fearing lest his brain might yield under the strain, he spread the letter open on the table, and read it many times. At first eyes and mind were equally incapable of mastering its contents; but a subconscious knowledge that he must either understand those vague words or go mad in time enabled their sense to penetrate the gathering mists.

And this is what he read:

"Derry, I am leaving you. Mr. Willard has followed us. He is here with me now. He has forced me to believe that duty demands my return to Hugh Marten; so I am going. It is best so. Derry, don't grieve for me. If I thought——[these three words were canceled]. Derry, forgive me. I can write no more. My poor heart is breaking.

"NANCY."

Slowly, through a haze of pain, certain incongruities were revealed in the curt, disconnected sentences. Never before, in all the years he had known her, had Nancy alluded to her father as "Mr. Willard." Even during these later days, when the discovery of a parent's treachery was a prime factor in her seemingly irrevocable decision to dissolve her marriage, she spoke of him invariably in terms of affection. Indeed, Power had practised some measure of duplicity by pretending to agree with her hopeful prophecy of a speedy reconciliation between Willard and himself. He believed he had summed up the man's character only too well. Such a mean nature would assuredly remain stubborn in its hostility; in fact, he was prepared to encounter greater difficulties and annoyance from Willard than from Marten, and meant to persuade Nancy to take a world-tour of some years' duration as soon as the divorce was secured, and they were legally married. Why, then, should it be "Mr. Willard" who had followed them, and not "my father," or "Dad"?

And what an extraordinary plea she had put forward to excuse her precipitate flight? "He has forced me to believe that duty demands my return to Hugh Marten!" When had woman ever convinced herself more thoroughly than Nancy that "duty" did not "demand" the sacrifice of her whole life? Had she not weighed "duty" in the balance, and found it wanting, before she cast all other considerations to the winds, and fled from Newport with the man she loved? But "Mr. Willard" had "forced" that view upon her. Forced! A strange word! Had he threatened to mur-

der her? Had she written that letter at the dictation of a maniac? Why, of course! The notion stung Power to the quick, and he groaned aloud. How crass and blind had been his anguished spirit when first it quivered under the shock of her disappearance! How much wiser and saner was Peter Granite! Even Guess, the dog, read the riddle aright, and had urged instant action. And how fortunate that these two faithful friends had raced off in pursuit rather than wait at the cabin until belated reason shed its light on the brain of the one person in the world Nancy must have trusted to understand her dilemma. At the thought of his failure to grasp the essential elements of a mystery that was simplicity itself when analyzed in cold logic, the blood rushed through his veins like a stream of molten metal, and he leaped to his feet, all afire now to be up and doing. He ran out, and was plunging wildly into the tangle of forest and scrub, when it occurred to him that undirected search in that wilderness was worse than useless. He was no Indian, skilled in jungle lore, that he should discern the tracks of pursued and pursuers, and follow them unerringly. Better possess his soul in patience until some sight or sound announced the return of Peter—with Nancy. Oh, yes, Peter and the dog would soon overtake that vengeful old man and his terrified victim! Pray Heaven there might be no opportunity given Willard to do evil to the girl who had thwarted his plans! Yet how often had the chance to do ill deeds made ill deeds done. Power wilted now under a horrible doubt which brought fresh tortures. He listened for the distant pistol-shot which might shatter his new-found hope.

Perforce, he stilled his frenzy, and stood in anguished silence.

But no sound of death-dealing weapon jarred on the brooding solitude of that lake amid the hills; the earliest intimation he received of the real nature of his loss was when Granite and the dog came back—alone.

He strode a few paces to meet his allies, and in that moment of black despair the pride of his manhood sustained him, and choked the bitter words, the fierce ravings, the storming of the very heavens, which tore and raged for utterance, yet were so futile and helpless in the one way that mattered—the rescue of his lost love.

"So, then, you could not overtake them?" he said, and, if Granite had not seen Power when the blow fell, he would never have estimated the volcanic fury of the furnace hidden under Power's unemotional voice and manner.

"No, sir," came the quiet answer. "Thar was hosses in waitin', three hosses. They've circled the head of the lake, an' I saw Mrs. Power's dress as they rode away from the hotel."

The perplexed guide deemed it best to blurt out the actual facts. He thought, and rightly so, that any attempt to minimize the full extent of the tragedy would only add to Power's suffering when he knew the truth. Nor was he comforted in the least by the unnatural calm with which his news was received.

"But, look-a here, Mr. Power!" he protested earnestly. "I'm ready to swear on the biggest Testament ever prent that your good lady didn't vamoose of her

own free will. Leave you? Gol-darn it, that's a bit too rich fur me ter believe! Who's tuk her, anyhow? Why did she go? What sort of a spiel did the cuss put up that she walked off with him—when she had a gun, an' Guess was here, an' she must ha seen you an' me comin' in the canoe?"

"The man was her father. This quarrel is between him and me. Peter, we must cross the lake at once. We can hire horses at the hotel?"

Granite shook his head sorrowfully. The affair was beyond his comprehension; but it was his business to undeceive his employer if he was counting on the chance of overtaking the vanished pair.

"Sorry," he said. "This yer plot was well laid. They run three nags at the hotel, an' the hull blamed bunch hit the pike fur Racket."

Racket was the nearest station, the terminus of a short railway serving the Forked Lake district. It lay six miles away! With the start Willard had secured, he would be at the rail-head before the others had crossed the lake. But Power knew he would go mad if compelled to remain in the cabin when Nancy was not there, and Granite made no further effort to detain him.

"We'll travel a heap quicker if we unload them stores," was all he said, and Power turned instantly to help in the work. When Peter had occasion to enter the cabin, he examined the gun, and found the two cartridges.

"Gosh!" he muttered. "She tuk 'em out herself. I allow she didn't want ter shoot her own father; but she must hev' damn well felt like it!"

Then he eyed the dog.

"Wish you could talk, Pup," he said. "Your long lugs heerd what passed atween them two, an' I guess it kinder tried you good hard ter keep yer teeth outen that old sinner's leg."

Power spoke no word until the canoe rested by the side of the small landing-stage provided by the hotel. Bidding the guide await his return, he hastened into the building and found the proprietor. Yes, a Mr. Francis had registered two days ago. He had rented a room overlooking the lake, and had hired the hotel's three horses this morning. Two of the animals were carrying him and a lady to Racket, and the rider of the third was a groom, who had charge of Mr. Francis's grip, and who would bring the nags back from the depot. Mr. Francis seemed to be in a desperate hurry; but that was not to be wondered at if he meant to catch the next south-bound train, there being just fifty minutes in which to cover the five miles. There was no other train until the night mail, which was due to leave Racket at seven o'clock. The hotel possessed a buggy; but Mr. Francis refused to use it. In fact, he was willing to pay any price for the horses; though it was most inconvenient that there should not even be one horse left in the stable, as it might be wanted in an emergency.

Power thanked his informant, who doubtless wondered what whiff of excitement had stirred this remote corner of New York state that morning; but gleaned little from his cool, self-contained questioner. Indeed, Power raised only one more point—could he be driven to Racket for the late train?—and was

assured that there would be no difficulty in that respect.

Then Peter received his orders.

"Pack Mrs. Power's baggage and mine, and bring everything here," said Power. "I want you to remain in the cabin till you hear from me; but come to the hotel every day for a letter or telegram."

Granite nodded, and paddled off silently and swiftly. He understood, not all, but some part, of Power's mood. There were ordeals from which any man would flinch, and high among these for the bereaved husband (as the guide deemed him) would rank the heartbreaking task of sorting out and folding Nancy's clothes, and replacing her toilet requisites in a dressing-case. Each garment would speak of her with a hundred mouths, each tiny silver article and cut-glass bottle would recall the grace of her gestures when she was brushing her luxuriant hair or shrugging her slim shoulders in laughing protest against Derry's clumsiness as a lady maid.

Before Peter returned, a luncheon-gong boomed from the porch of the hotel, and a number of men came in from their canoes or fishing-punts. One of a small party noticed Power sitting on a shaded seat in the little garden which ran down to the water's edge.

"Isn't that the man with the pretty wife who lives in Granite's shack?" he asked. "He looks as though he'd lost a dollar and found a nickel."

"P'r'aps he's lost his missis," laughed another.

"No fear. They're a honeymoon couple if ever there was one. Why, when he comes here for stores she stands at the door of the hut the whole time he is

absent, watching him all the way here and waving to him all the way home again."

The hotelkeeper, noting Power's absence from the dining-room, sent a maid to remind him that the meal was being served.

Power started violently when the girl's soft-spoken words broke in on his reverie. For an instant he dreamed that Nancy had come, that he would feel her fingers clasped over his eyes, hear her voice.

"It is so hot and quiet here," he explained, smiling pleasantly, "that I was nearly asleep. I don't need any lunch, thank you."

Yet never had man seemed more wakeful. The girl thought that surely he must be ill, and in pain, and she wondered why his wife had left him; for Nancy's departure was already known to the hotel servants, since nothing could happen in that secluded nook without their cognizance, and Willard's corner in horse-flesh that morning had been much discussed in the kitchen.

Granite, however, put in an appearance soon, and insisted that Power should eat.

"You'll be headin' for N' York, I reckon," he said, "an' there ain't no sort o' sense in makin' that long trip on an empty stummick. You jest take my say-so, Mr. Power, an' eat yer meals reg'lar, an' you'll size up things altogether different when you set down to yer breakfast tomorrow."

His well-meant advice caused a thrill of agony. Breakfast without Nancy! The dawn of the first day when she was not by his side! The mind often works in grooves, and Power's thoughts flew back to that

other day when he lay crushed on the ledge. As he walked to the hotel with the guide, his leg seemed to be almost broken again, and he moved with difficulty.

Afterward, he spoke and acted in a curiously mechanical way. He was aware that he gave Granite detailed instructions, and paid him far more than the friendly disposed fellow was inclined to accept, and stowed himself and various portmanteaus in the buggy when the hotel proprietor warned him it was time he should set out. He remembered, too, being told that a young lady and an elderly man had taken tickets for New York by the midday train from Racket; but the journey thenceforth was a meaningless blank. He gave no heed to the passing of the hours. He did not even know when the train reached the Grand Central Station. Before he realized that he must bestir himself, one of the attendants had to ask him sarcastically where he wanted to go, as the engineer thought he wouldn't butt into Park Avenue that morning.

Still behaving like one in a dream, he wandered out of the station into 42d Street, drifted down Fifth Avenue, and entered the Waldorf Hotel. Here, luckily, he was recognized by a clerk—an expert who never forgot a patron's name or face—and was allotted rooms. Otherwise, he would certainly have been turned away politely; for his unkempt appearance and half-demented air offered the poorest of recommendations to one of New York's palatial hotels.

"What about your baggage, Mr. Power?" inquired the clerk, whose private opinion favored the view that this erstwhile spick-and-span client had been "hitting it up some."

"Baggage? Let me think? I have some recollection——"

Power searched in his pockets, and found a number of brass checks. He really had not the slightest notion as to when and where that detail was attended to, but habit had evidently proved stronger than emotion, and some sense of gratitude stirred in him that he had not mislaid his own few belongings—and Nancy's.

Then, worn out physically and mentally, he threw himself on a bed and slept. He awoke after three hours, and some of the cloud had lifted off his brain. He felt able to think clearly, and plan a course of action, and that in itself was a blessing. He saw now that, if Nancy were actually humoring a homicidal maniac, she would lead her father straight to Newport, knowing full well that he, Derry, would come there without fail. True, there were sentences in that terrible letter which hardly bore out this argument; but, then, it was probably written under Willard's watching eyes, and that last heartrending farewell might have been the only formula she could devise for a final leave-taking compelled by a loaded revolver.

At any rate, he would telegraph to Dacre, in whose discretion he trusted implicitly; so, not without a strenuous effort needed to collect his wits, he drafted an ambiguously worded telegram.

"My friend's father came to the Adirondacks yesterday, and effected departure forcibly during my absence. Will you make guarded inquiries? Wire me Waldorf Hotel on receipt of this message, and later."

It was a relief to think that he had taken one decisive step. During the two hours of inaction before a reply could come to hand, he bathed, changed his clothes, and ate some food, for which he was ravenous, having refused to dine on the train.

Bethinking himself, too, that Nancy might have found some means of telegraphing on her own account, he inquired, first at the hotel bureau, but without result, since any communications received there would have been sent to his room, and secondly at his bank. Yes, here were letters and telegrams galore, some readdressed from Newport, and others sent direct. He tore open the telegrams feverishly.

But what was this?

"Your mother asking for you every hour. Why don't you wire?

"MacGonigal."

And another:

"For Heaven's sake, wire if this reaches you, and start west by next train.

"MacGonigal."

The messages latest in arriving were naturally on top of the bundle, and his trembling fingers were tearing at another envelop when someone touched him on the shoulder. It was an official of the bank, who had spoken to him twice in vain across the counter, and was now standing at his side.

"I'm afraid you have bad news from Bison, Mr. Power," he said gently. "Your manager—or part-

ner, is it?—Mr. MacGonigal, has been telegraphing us repeatedly during the past five days; but unfortunately we did not know where to find you. Your mother is ill, very ill."

"Is she dead?"

Power could only whisper the words, and the other noted in voice and manner what he construed as a son's natural agitation at such a moment.

"No," he said, "but she is undoubtedly in danger. It seems to me, from what MacGonigal says, that a telegram from you telling her you are on board a west-bound train will be more effective than any doctor's treatment."

Power was shaking as though from ague. He alone knew the frightful alternative that faced him now. If he went to Newport, he would be deserting his mother, who was perhaps dying. If he went to Bison, he was deserting Nancy in the hour of her utmost need. At that instant he dared not, he could not, decide, and the knowledge that he even hesitated was like the thrust of a sword through his heart.

"I—I——" he began, and his tongue seemed to refuse its office.

"I quite understand, Mr. Power," said the official, an assistant manager, as it happened, and a shrewd and kindly man. "It is useless to think of leaving New York before tonight. Come to my desk. I'll write a telegram for you which will straighten things out. Will you travel by the Pennsylvania and Rock Island Route? I thought so. The train starts at seven o'clock; so you have plenty of time to receive an answer from Bison. Now, how will this do?"

And he wrote:

"Your telegrams only just opened. Coming by tonight's train by Pennsylvania road. Wire me care of station agent, Pittsburgh, Fort Wayne, Chicago, and Omaha. Message today before six will reach me at Waldorf Hotel. Give my love to mother and bid her cheer up."

Power muttered what he conceived to be words of thanks. Then, rushing to his rooms in the hotel like a hunted animal seeking sanctuary, he read MacGonigal's earlier telegrams. There were letters, too, no less than three from his mother, who seemed perplexed and uneasy because of the varying postmarks on his correspondence, but made no mention of her illness.

Indeed, the last letter, dated only a week earlier, spoke of a shopping expedition to Denver she and Mrs. Moore and the two girls had taken the previous day. MacGonigal, too, was not explicit. "Mrs. Power very ill and desperately anxious to see you," ran one telegram. Another told of Dr. Stearn being summoned, and remaining in constant attendance; but the burden of each and every message was that he, Power, must come home.

It was not surprising that the unhappy son should see in his mother's sudden collapse the hand of the Almighty. Deep in the heart of every man and woman is planted the conviction that an unseen and awful deity deals out retribution as well as justice to erring humanity. Power was under no delusion as to his personal responsibility for his actions. He had done wrong, and now he was being punished. "A man's heart deviseth the way, but the Lord directeth his

steps." Sternly and terribly had his feet been turned to the new path; but if he flung himself on his knees and prayed now, it was not for forgiveness of his own sin, but in frenzied petition that it should not be visited on his mother and Nancy. Even in this new delirium of suffering he did not forget the woman he loved. Though his torment was as the torment of a scorpion, he asked that Nancy, too, might be spared. On his head be the punishment; but let the Divine Ruler of the world have pity on her youth, and find innocence in her, for she had been hardly dealt by!

He was still kneeling in anguish of spirit when an awe-stricken page entered the room with a telegram. If aught were needed to crush him into the dust, it was forthcoming in Dacre's guarded words:

"Have accidentally secured brief talk on telephone with friend indicated, who arrived this morning Fall River steamer. No secret made of intentions, which I am bidden to warn you are final. Going with father to Europe at once; but would not discuss reasons, for which, obviously, I could not press. I am puzzled and shocked. Command me in any way. Have you received urgent summons to Bison? Your mother is ill."

Then, and not until then, did some Heaven-sent clarity of vision reveal to Power that Nancy had not been acting a part when she wrote the letter he found in the hut. It was only too true that, as he told Peter Granite in the first mad words which burst from his lips, she had left him forever. He did not pretend to understand her motives—he was sure he never would understand them—but her action, at least, was finite.

He knew now she was gone beyond recall. By some malign trick of fate she was probably stating her unalterable resolve over the telephone to his friend at the very moment he was reeling under the shock of MacGonigal's frantic messages with reference to his mother.

Well, be it so! His dream of a life's happiness had been shattered by a thunderbolt from a summer sky, and, crowning misery, here was his mother at death's door, in a state of mind surely aggravated by distress because of uncertainty as to his whereabouts! Sheer despair was again calming if benumbing him when, by ill-chance, his haggard eyes dwelt on Nancy's letter. The concluding words seemed to grip him by the throat:

"I can write no more. My poor heart is breaking."

God of mercy, what did it all mean? He gave way utterly. A strong man weeping is a pitiable sight, and Nancy's high resolve might have weakened had she seen him in that bitter hour.

Perhaps she knew. She must have known. Her forlorn soul must have gaged his distress by the measure of her own sorrowful longing. But she had deceived Power so thoroughly that not for many a year did he even guess that her flight was undertaken solely on his account. And it was better so; for the story of their love might have been stained by a sordid tragedy, and Power, instead of going West that night, would have taken a special train to Newport with fixed intent to choke Willard's wretched life out of him. As it was, he crossed two-thirds of the great land which had given him vast wealth, and much tribulation, and little

joy. At New York, and elsewhere en route, he received telegrams from his trusty friend at Bison. They were not reassuring; but they did, at least, contain one grain of comfort in the tidings that his mother still lived.

But therein MacGonigal allowed his heart to control his pen; for Mrs. Power breathed her last before her son had quitted New York, and it was to a town in mourning that Power returned. His mother had endeared herself to every soul in the place. The people looked on her as their guardian angel. They almost scowled on John Darien Power when the flying feet of his horse clattered along the main street in his haste to soothe the fretfulness of a woman who was already three days dead. Why did he leave her? they asked. Where had he hidden that the country should be scoured for him during the last week, and none could find him? He used to be a decent, outspoken sort of fellow, Derry Power; but wealth had spoiled him, as it seemed to spoil every man who secured it. Queer thing! Deponent thought that he, or she, would risk the experiment at the price.

Thus, light-hearted gossip, which talks in headlines, and recks little of the subtler issues of life.

CHAPTER XII

AFTER DARKNESS, LIGHT

Death brings peace. Having accomplished its dread mission, it atones to the body from which the soul is snatched by smoothing away the lines of agony from the face; it seems even to relent for awhile, and restore to worn and aged features the semblance of long-vanished youth.

When Power looked at his dead mother, he saw her as she might have looked in placid sleep when he was a boy in San Francisco. But a discovery that is often soothing to those who are bereft of their nearest and dearest brought him no consolation. His stupor of grief and misery was denied the relief of tears. Rather did his brooding thought run to the other extreme. The mother he loved was at rest—why should he not join her? He believed, like many another man who has passed through the furnace of a soul-destroying passion, that he had drunk the flame-wreathed cup of life to the dregs. The fiery potion had swept through his veins and reduced him to ashes. He was no longer even the recluse of the Dolores Ranch, finding in books solace for a lost love, but the burnt-out husk of his former self. What was there left, that he should wish to live? Why should he not end it all, and seek the kindly oblivion of the grave?

Ever stronger and more insistently did this idea

take root in his mind, and some evil monitor seemed to bellow it at him when he stood next day in the cemetery, and saw the coffin lowered into the earth. The beautiful words of the burial service give sorely needed help to stricken hearts; but this man's ears were closed to their solemn promise.

"I am the resurrection and the life, saith the Lord: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live."

The minister's voice, hitherto broken and tremulous, for he held the dead woman in much esteem, and her loss was grievous to him, rang out with a new confidence when it declaimed that splendid passage; yet Power was conscious only of a desire to cry aloud in frenzied protest. Then that phase passed; the tumult died down; he shrank into a lethargy which was infinitely more dangerous than a state of wild revolt.

In that black mood he was watched unceasingly by faithful friends. MacGonigal and Jake were never far from his side. Though he did not know of, and would have angrily resented, their quiet guardianship, he could not have taken his own life just then, and the time was yet far distant when he would ask himself in wonder and thankfulness how he had escaped death by his own hand during the first dreary hours following his return to Bison.

But there were other influences at work, and one of these made its presence felt speedily. After the funeral he was sitting alone in the room which he had converted into a library. His unseeing eyes were fixed on the smiling landscape into which irrigation had converted the once arid ranch. A troop of brood mares,

with foals at heel, were emulating mankind by neglecting the lush pastures at their feet and craning their graceful necks over a palisade to nibble the thorn hedge it protected. This double barrier shut off the lawn and garden from the meadow lands. Here and there the green of apple orchards, planted with artistic regard to open vistas, was already flecked with golden fruit. Soon the reapers would be busy on the sections where maize and oats and wheat were ripening. The lowing of cattle announced that milking-time was near; for, among her other activities, Mrs. Power had established a model dairy, and it was her gentle boast that she had made it pay; thus bringing out in the mother the money-coining instincts which the son had developed so unexpectedly.

Such a scene might well lull the beholder to rest; but Power was blind to its charms. He was reviewing, in an aimless way, the associations which that very apartment held for him. Changed though it was out of all semblance to the poverty-stricken living-room of the ranch, Nancy's spirit had never been wholly exorcised. He pictured her slim and lissome figure as she had stood with him at the window many an evening, and watched the purple shadows stealing over the hills. In that room she had married Marten. From a bamboo stand near one of the windows she had taken the spray of white heather which formed her wedding bouquet. Why had she never mentioned it to him? Or were the last five weeks nothing but some disordered vision of the imagination, a delusion akin to those glimpses of palm-laden oases and flashing waters which come to thirst-maddened wanderers in deserts?

But another shadow intervened. His mother, in turn, had loved the gorgeous sunsets of Colorado; she, too, was wont to gaze at the far-flung panorama which once delighted Nancy's eyes. And she, alas! had become a dream which would never again wake into reality. At that moment the relief of tears was imminent—and tears are intolerable to a strong man. He sprang upright in a spasm of pain, and bitter words escaped him brokenly.

The movement, no less than the few disconnected sentences, seemed to arouse Jake, who happened to be lounging against one of the pillars of the veranda—out of sight, perhaps, but certainly not out of hearing.

"Would yer keer ter hev an easy stroll around, Mistah Power?" he said instantly.

"No, thanks—why are you waiting there? Do you want to speak to me?"

This questioning might bear interpretation as the outburst of one who resented the overseer's presence; but Jake was ready with the soft answer which turneth away wrath:

"No, sir. Not exactly, that is. I was jest waitin' fur Mac. He allowed he'd be back about this time. Gosh! Here he is, crossin' the divide, an' totin' along some tony galoot I hain't seen afore."

"Tell MacGonigal, and every other person in the place, that I am not to be disturbed."

Power withdrew from the French window, and Jake nodded to the group of horses.

"You're feelin' pretty bad, I guess," he said to himself. "But thar ain't a gun in the outfit outside my locked grip, an' you cahn't find enough rope ter

hang a cat, an' the only pisen in the ranch is on a sideboard, an' a skinful of that would do you good, an' this yer son of a gun can stand a lot o' black looks from you, Derry."

He heard Power sink into a chair on the inner side of the room, and sheer curiosity led him to steal along the veranda to the porch, where MacGonigal and a stranger were alighting from a two-wheeled buggy.

"Derry's jest tole me ter quit," he said in a stage whisper, jerking his left hand, as though it still possessed a thumb, in the direction of the library.

The newcomer, a tall, well-built man of middle age, smiled involuntarily at the queer gesture. As it happened, he had never before seen a veritable cowboy outside the bounds of one or other of the American circus shows which visit Europe occasionally, and Jake had donned his costliest rig for the funeral.

"Shall I find Mr. Power in that room with the open window?" he inquired.

"Yes, sir," said Jake.

"I think he will be glad to see me," said the unknown, and, without further comment, he ran up the steps and entered the veranda. The two men watched him in silence. They saw him halt in front of the window, and heard him say, "Power, may I come in?" They heard the scraping of a chair on the parquet floor as it was thrust aside; then the stranger vanished.

"Who's the dook?" demanded Jake, vastly surprised by the turn of events.

"Friend o' Derry's," said MacGonigal, *sotto voce*. "He wired me from Newport, an' his messages struck

me as comin' from a white man; so I gev' him the fax, an' the nex' thing I hear is that he's on the rail, but I'm to keep mum, as he thought it 'ud help Derry some if he kem on him suddint. An' here he is."

During a full minute neither man spoke. At last, Jake, who appeared to have something on his mind, brought it out.

"Thar was a piece 'bout Derry and Mrs. Marten in the *Rocky Mountain News* a week sence," he began.

"Thar was," agreed MacGonigal, who looked vastly uncomfortable in a suit of heavy black cloth.

"Not anything ter make a song of," went on Jake. "An or'nary kind o' yarn, 'bout a point-ter-point steeplechase, whatever that sort o' flam may be, an' Bison won, in course."

"Jest so," said the other.

"Guess you spotted it, too?"

"Guess I did.

"Marten's in Baku. Whar's Baku?"

"I don't know, but it's a damn long way from Newport, anyhow, or Derry an' Nancy wouldn't be cavortin' round together on plugs from one p'int to any other p'int."

"You an' me sized up that proposition same like."

"We're a slick pair," grunted MacGonigal sarcastically.

"That's as may be—I've heerd folk say wuss ner that 'bout you," said Jake. "But what I want ter know is this: S'pose some other low-down cuss gits busy, and stirs his gray matter thinkin' hard on things he saw in the newspaper, what's ter be done?"

MacGonigal brought his big red face very near

Jake's olive-skinned one. "If he's on the ranch, bounce him; if he's in Bison, let me know," he growled.

Meanwhile, the man whose interests they were planning to safeguard had looked up in anger when a shadow darkened the open window; but he started to his feet in sheer amazement when he saw Dacre and heard his voice.

"You?" he cried. "How in God's name did *you* get here?"

"You were in trouble, Power, and I count it a poor friendship that shirks a few days' journey when a chum is in distress."

Their hands met, and Power's white face showed a wave of color. He was deeply stirred. For the moment he was an ordinary man, and subject to ordinary emotions.

"I had better be outspoken," continued Dacre. "I got in touch with Mr. MacGonigal, and he informed me of your mother's death; so I have hurried across America to be with you. Being rather afraid you might stop me en route, I requested MacGonigal not to tell you I was coming."

"But I regard your action as a most kindly one."

"Yes, now that I am here. For all that, old man, you might have wired very emphatic instructions on the point to Omaha yesterday."

"My dear fellow, you find me in a house of mourning. Won't you sit down? You must be tired. Can I get you anything?"

"My bones are stiff for want of exercise—that is all. Now, if you want to be a perfect host, have my traps sent to my room. . . . Don't say you haven't a

spare bedroom! . . . Good! I'll just open a bag, and get some tea—of course, you can't possibly produce any decent tea—and your cook will boil a kettle, and after we have refreshed on the beverage that cheers while it does not inebriate, you will take me for a walk around this delightful ranch of yours. You see, I don't mean to let you mope here by yourself. That is the last thing the dear lady who has been taken from you would wish. You will regard me as a beastly nuisance, but that cannot be helped."

The ghost of a smile twinkled in Power's eyes. He was quite alive to his friend's object in rattling along in this fashion; but it was an undeniable relief that he should be compelled to follow the lead given so cheerfully.

"To show that you are welcome I'll even drink your strong tea," he said. "Nor am I alone here, as you seem to imagine. There are three ladies in the house—Mrs. Moore and her daughters, Minnie and Margaret. Hand over your bohea to Mrs. Moore—she'll dispense it properly, and appreciate it, too, I have little doubt."

In such wise was the black dog care partly lifted off Power's shoulders. He had yet to learn that the human vessel cannot contain more than its due measure of sorrow. When it is filled to the brim no additional grief can find lodgment. Misfortune carried to excess has made cowards brave and given fools wisdom, and Derry Power was neither coward nor fool.

Mrs. Moore was naturally surprised when the visitor was introduced; but she hailed his presence with obvious relief. MacGonigal and Jake were invited to join the tea-party—and, at any other time, the cow-

boy's struggles with a tiny cup and saucer of delicate china, a microscopic teaspoon, and a roll of thin bread and butter would have caused a good deal of merriment. Mac, thanks to his training in the store, juggled easily with these implements, and there was an air almost of light-heartedness about the company before it broke up at Power's suggestion that he and Dacre might smoke while surveying some part of the ranch.

Dacre showed his knowledge of human nature by leading his friend on to talk of his mother. That way, he was sure, lay the waters of healing. While deploring the unhappy circumstances which attended Mrs. Power's death, which Dr. Stearn put down to failure of the heart's action, he swept aside her son's bitter self-condemnation.

"Death," he said, "is the one element in human affairs which may not be estimated in that general way. If your mother's heart was affected, she was far more likely to die of some sudden excitement than because of a not very poignant anxiety as to your prolonged absence from home. I suppose, in a sense, she knew where you were?"

"Yes. I—I deceived her with sufficient skill," came the morbid retort.

"Then you must school yourself to dwell on those long years of pleasant companionship in the past rather than this final parting, which you attribute to a cause that exists only in your imagination. I think Tennyson's philosophy is at fault in the line:

'Sorrow's crown of sorrow is remembering happier things.'

I hold that Cowper peered more closely into the fiber and essence of humanity when he wrote:

> 'The path of sorrow, and that path alone,
> Leads to the land where sorrow is unknown;
> No traveler ever reached that blest abode
> Who found not thorns and briars in his road.'

You were utterly unnerved and wretched when the news of your mother's illness reached you. You magnified your personal responsibility out of all reasonable proportion. I can see no proof of other influence than the fixed course and final outcome of a disease difficult to detect and incapable of cure."

They were nearing the Gulch, Power having chosen that direction because of the uninterrupted view of the surrounding country they would secure from the top of the rising ground.

"I wish I might accept your comforting theory," he said, more composedly. "Somehow, I feel that I am to blame, or, if that is a crude expression, that I was made the instrument of some devilish act of retribution. However, I do not profess myself able to regard such a problem in a critical light today. You won't think me heartless if I inquire into the conditions which led up to the telegram you sent me in New York? I was too dazed that morning to understand clearly what had happened. Did you actually speak to Nancy herself over the telephone?"

"Yes."

"Well?"

"Are you really feeling up to the strain of hearing what took place?"

Power stopped suddenly, caught his friend's arm, and pointed to a small wooden structure erected in a singular position on the western side of the canyon.

"You have not forgotten the story I told you that last night in Newport?" he cried.

"No. I remember every word of it."

"Well, that little shack up there stands on the ledge where I rediscovered the lode after being nearly crushed to death. I crawled to within a few yards of this very spot; so resolved was I that no one should rob me of the price I was paid for Nancy. I am the same man now that I was then, Dacre—and in a very similar mood. Strain! I have been strained to the limit. I have thought of taking my own life; not from lack of capacity to endure further ills, but from sheer disgust at the crassness of things. At least, then, let me inquire into their meaning. What did she say to you?"

Despite his unwillingness to add to the heavy load Power had to bear, Dacre was not altogether sorry to get an unpleasing task over and done with. But he felt his way carefully; since he, too, was groping in the dark to a certain extent.

"Your telegram did not take me wholly by surprise," he said. "I knew that Nancy—you don't mind if I use her name in that way, do you? Well, then, I had heard of her return. Mrs. Van Ralten rang me up to say that Mr. Willard and his daughter had arrived by the steamer in the early morning. I think I took such astounding news calmly enough; but I have a suspicion that the good lady herself was a trifle worried, and was only too glad to have the chance of

announcing the fact of her friend's reappearance. She added that Nancy was ill, having been overcome by the terrific heat in New York, and I chimed in with the proper sentiments; though I have seldom been more bewildered than at that moment. Soon afterward your message came, and I began dimly to grasp the position. I seized the pretext of Mrs. Van Ralten's statement to call up Nancy's residence, and, by some sort of fortune, whether good or bad I can't determine, she herself answered. I concocted a suitable excuse; but she solved the difficulty at once by saying that, as your friend, I ought to know the facts. She had resolved to leave you, 'to put an end to a mad dream' was a phrase she used, and asked me to tell you that she adhered resolutely to the decision she had announced in a letter the previous day. She added that she was sailing in a steamer from Boston with her father that night, and hoped I would spread the impression that she had been ill, and needed a sea voyage. I can assure you, old chap, I was completely flabbergasted. Admiring her as I do, I would never have believed that she would act in that extraordinary manner had I not received the story from her own lips, if one may so describe a conversation by telephone. I was so horribly afraid lest some outsider in the hotel might overhear me that I dared not question her. The talk was studiously formal on her part, and I was so thoroughly cut up that I could not attempt to convey my impressions in your telegram. Moreover, as a diligent student of Shakespeare, was I not warned that

> 'Though it be honest, it is never good
> To bring bad news.'

Certainly, I was not quite in the position of Cleopatra's messenger, since I could only confirm a disaster already known to you; but I literally shrank from the obvious inferences. Then came MacGonigal's revelation of events here. I simply couldn't rest. After a miserable twenty-four hours of vacillation, I started for New York, calling at your hotel to make sure you had gone west. One thing more. A Chicago newspaper gave a list of passengers sailing from Boston in a Red Star liner. In it were the names of Nancy and her father."

For an appreciable time after Dacre had concluded neither man spoke. Then Power said quietly:

"Thus endeth the second lesson."

His companion was not one who indulged in platitudes. Some men, kind-hearted and pitying, would have reminded him that he was still young, that life was rich in promise, that time would heal, or, at any rate, sear, the ugliest wounds. But Dacre said none of these things. He merely asked if Power meant to tell him what really happened in the Adirondacks. A good talker, he was also a good listener. Power would recover, he was convinced. He was not the first man, nor would he be the last, to clasp a phantom and find it air. Meanwhile, outspoken confidence should provide an efficient safety-valve for emotions contained at too high a pressure.

Power yielded to this friendly urging, but not instantly. Indeed, he astonished the Englishman by his next utterance.

"Nearly four years ago," he said, looking back at the ranch "in that room where you found me today,

I was reading 'The Autocrat' to Nancy one night, and a certain passage caught our attention. It ran somewhat like this: 'I would have a woman as true as death. At the first lie which works from the heart outward, she should be tenderly chloroformed into a better world.' Both of us laughed then, and now I know why we laughed. We were ignorant. Holmes, genial cynic that he was, understood women; he wrote a vital thing when he described the sort of lie that comes from the heart. I put trust in two women, and one of them has betrayed it. If I live another fifty years, I shall never understand why Nancy left me—never, never! I would as soon have thought of suspecting an angel from heaven of disloyalty as Nancy."

"Has she proved disloyal?"

"What else? I tried to find comfort in the belief that her father compelled her to accompany him by threatening to kill her if she refused. But, in these days, that sort of melodrama does not endure beyond its hour. She could have escaped him fifty times during the last six days. She could have appealed to you for help. Mary Van Ralten would at least have shielded her from murder. Yet, what are the facts? In a letter to me she pleaded duty as an excuse. She must have had some similar plea in her mind when she spoke to you. And she has gone to Europe—to rejoin Marten!"

He broke off with a gesture of disdain. He was in revolt. The statue which had glowed into life under the breath of his love was hardening into polished ivory again.

"May I see that letter?" said Dacre.

"Yes. Here it is."

The older man read and reread Nancy's sorrow-laden words.

"She tells you her poor heart is breaking—I believe her—in every syllable," he said.

"Believe her—when she prates of duty—to Marten?"

"I don't profess to understand, yet I believe. I do, on my soul!"

Power's face grew dark with a grim humor that was more tragic than misery. "Am I to follow—by the next steamer?" he demanded.

"No. She will come back—send for you. The present deadlock cannot last."

Again Power showed his disbelief by a scornful grimace. "I am so deeply beholden to your friendship that I claim the privilege of saying that you are talking nonsense," he said. "She vowed the fidelity to me which I gave unreservedly to her; but what sort of inconstant ideal inspired her faith, that it should be shattered to atoms by the first real test? Could I ever trust her again? If it were possible, which it is not, that some new whim drove her back to America, am I a toy dog to be whistled to heel as soon as her woman's caprice dictates? To please her father, she married Marten; to placate her father, she has gone back to Marten; to gratify some feminine impulse, she flung herself in my arms; when impulse, or duty as she calls it, again overcomes reason, she may summon her obedient slave once more. Would I run to her call? I don't know. My God! I don't know."

"I'm sure you don't," was the quiet response; "nor do you know how unjust you are being to her, leaving me out of the question altogether. You are like a dismasted ship in a storm, driven this way and that by every cross sea, yet drifting hopelessly nearer a rock-bound coast. Yet men have saved their lives even in such desperate conditions. At the worst, short of death, they have scrambled ashore, bruised and maimed, but living. Now, I ask you to suspend judgment for a few days, or weeks. Enlightenment may come—it *must* come—perhaps from a source you little dream of now. Suppose I practise what I preach, and talk of something else. I think I have whipped you out of a lethargy that was harmful, and, in so far, have done you good. But I'm not here to discuss problems of psychology which are insoluble—for the present, at any rate. Tell me something of your property, of the mine, of Bison. What delightful character-types you picked up in MacGonigal and that picturesque-looking cowboy. And how did the latter gentleman lose the thumb off his left hand? Was it a mere accident? I hope not. I rather expect to hear a page out of the real history of the wild and woolly West."

Power was slightly ashamed of his outburst already. "You make me feel myself a blatant misanthropist," he said contritely. "I had no right to blaze out at you in that way. But, now you are here, you shall not escape so easily. Again, and most heartily, I thank you for coming. I realize now that what I wanted more than anything else in the world was some sympathetic ear into which to pour my griefs. Ordinarily,

I am not that sort of man. I prefer to endure the minor ills of life in silence. But I have been slammed so hard this time that self-control became a torture. I think I reached the full extent of my resources when I stood by my mother's open grave today, and saw her name on the coffin. I wanted to tear my heart out with my own hands. For a few seconds I was actually insane."

"MacGonigal told me how terribly shaken you were. He said you would have fallen if he had not held you up."

"Ah, was that it? I suppose I nearly fainted. Some nerve in my brain seemed to snap. Perhaps that is why I am talking at random now."

Not all Dacre's tact could stop the imminent recital of events since their last meeting. Yet, curiously enough, Power seemed to grow calmer, more even-minded, as he told of his idyl and its dramatic close. By the time they had reached the house again he had recast his views as to Nancy's desertion of him. During some few days thereafter Fate ceased her outrageous attacks, and he was vouchsafed a measure of peace.

The next blow came from an unexpected hand. Mrs. Moore and her daughters were about to leave Bison for their home in San Francisco. All preparations were made, and their baggage was piled on the veranda ready for transport to the station, when the good lady who had proved such a stanch friend in an emergency called Power into the library. He noticed that she was carrying a small package, wrapped in a piece of linen, and tied with white ribbon.

"Derry," she said, "I have one sad duty to perform before I go."

He winced slightly. He was beginning to hate that word "duty." The very sound of it was ominous, full of foreboding.

"It is nothing to cause you any real sorrow," she went on, thinking he had misinterpreted her words. "Just before your dear mother's death she gave me to understand that I was to take charge of a bundle of letters which she kept under her pillow. They were meant for you, I suppose; but unfortunately I could not make out her wishes. Anyhow, here they are. You are the one person in the world who can decide whether or not they should be destroyed. I put them in a locked box, and would have given them to you sooner, but——" She hesitated, seemingly at a loss for a word.

"But I was acting like a lunatic, and you were afraid of the consequences," he said, with a pleasant smile.

"Well, I have never seen any man so hard hit," she admitted. "Mr. Dacre's arrival was a perfect God-send, for you and all of us; so I thought it best to keep these letters longer than I had planned at first, though I am sure there is nothing in them to cause you any distress. Indeed, I have an idea that they are mostly your own correspondence, sent from New York and elsewhere, because I saw your handwriting on an envelop, and a postmark. You are not vexed with me for retaining them until today?"

Power reassured her on that point. He placed the packet, just as it was, in a drawer of a writing-desk,

and did not open it until he had returned from the station after escorting the women to their train.

Dacre had strolled to the outbuildings to inspect a reaping-machine of new design which had been procured for harvesting work; so the room was otherwise untenanted when the son began to examine his mother's last bequest. At first it seemed as if Mrs. Moore's surmise was correct. The first few letters he glanced at were those he had despatched from New York and Newport. Then he came upon others posted at Racket, and a twinge of remorse shook him when he recalled the subterfuges and evasions they contained. Still it had been impossible to set forth the truth, and there was a crumb of comfort in the fact that he had written nothing untrue.

He was so disturbed by the painful memories evoked by each date that he was on the verge of tying the bundle together again when his eye was caught by one letter in a strange handwriting. The postmark showed that it hailed from New York, and the date was a curious one being exactly six days after he and Nancy went from Newport.

Instantly he was aware of a strong impulse to burn that particular letter forthwith. Perhaps some psychic influence made itself felt in that instant. Perhaps a gentle and loving spirit reached from beyond the veil, and made one last effort to secure the fulfilment of a desire balked by the cruel urgency of death. But the forces of evil prevailed, and Power withdrew the written sheet from its covering.

And this is what he read:

"Madam.—Your son, John Darien Power, has probably represented to you that he is detained in the East by certain horse-dealing transactions. That is a lie. He has gone off with another man's wife. But his punishment will be swift and sure. He cannot escape it. Its nature will depend on the decision arrived at by the woman he has wronged. I am telling you the facts so that you may be in a position to form a just judgment, whether or not you ever see him again. Keep this letter; although it is unsigned. If circumstances require its production, the writer will not shirk responsibility for either its statements or its threats."

Dacre came in nearly an hour later. After witnessing an exhibition of the new reaper, he had gone with Jake to admire some of Power's recent purchases in horse-flesh, and the time passed rapidly. When he entered the room, he found his friend sitting in the shadows.

"Hello!" he cried. "I didn't know you had returned. I've been vetting those black Russians you bought at Newport. What a pair for a tandem!"

"Did Dr. Stearn ever tell you the exact cause of my mother's death?" was the curiously inappropriate reply, uttered in a low tone.

"Y-yes; acute ulcerative endocarditis was the actual cause. But why in the world do you ask such a question now?"

"Because our worthy doctor was mistaken. I alone know why she died. I killed her. You recollect I said as much to you the day you arrived."

"I wish to goodness you would cease talking, or even thinking, such arrant rubbish!"

"Nothing could be so certain. Willard wrote and told her I had taken Nancy away from Marten. Willard struck the blow; but I forged the weapon. My mother lay dying while I was philandering with another man's wife. Poor soul! She tried to have the letter destroyed—to spare me, no doubt—but the dagger I placed in Willard's hand had pierced so deep that she died with the words of forgiveness on her lips. No, you need not worry unduly, Dacre; though I have no right to harrow your feelings in this way. I shall not anticipate the decree of Providence by self-murder. My worst chastisement now is to live, knowing that I killed my mother."

"What damned rot!" broke out Dacre furiously.

Power rose, went to his friend, and put a hand on his shoulder. He smiled, with an odd semblance of content.

"You're a good chap," he said, "but a poor actor. You know I am right. You wouldn't stand in my shoes for all the gold in the Indies; 'for what doth it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul?' I've lost mine. I must try and find it again. Don't you see? That is my only chance. Good God! If there is another and a better life hereafter, I cannot meet my mother and tell her that I valued my wretched husk of a body so greatly that I made no search for the soul I flung away. I've thought it all out. The road is open and marked with signposts. A man without a soul can surely afford to risk his body. Come! It is growing dark, and this room will soon be peopled with ghosts. Let's walk in the fresh, cool air, and I'll explain myself clearly."

CHAPTER XIII

THE BEGINNING OF THE PILGRIMAGE

At first none save Dacre knew what was going on. To MacGonigal and Jake it seemed that Power was merely seeking distraction by putting his affairs in order, and they regarded such healing activity with joy. People in Bison, too, were delighted by the change in his habits. The man who used to leave to his mother everything connected with the social well-being of the town now gave these matters his close interest, and inquired thoroughly into the philanthropic schemes to which she had devoted so much time and almost unstinted means; incidentally, he contrived to puzzle Dr. Stearn.

One day, when in Denver on business, he called at the doctor's house.

"I want you to clear up a point that is bothering me," he said. "Suppose nothing unusual had occurred to hasten my mother's death, how long would she have lived?"

"Nothing unusual did occur," insisted Stearn.

"Ah! I have expressed myself awkwardly. How long, then, under the most favorable conditions, could she have lived?"

"Three or four years."

"Five?"

"It is possible."

"Six?"

"I should doubt it."

"Seven?"

"You are marching too rapidly. If Mrs. Power lived seven years with inflamed aortic valves, I should regard the fact as something akin to a miracle."

"But miracles do happen, even in science?"

"Um—yes."

"Thank you, Doctor. That is all I wish to know. Anything you want for your poorer patients?"

Stearn laughed. "Great Scott!" he cried, "you ought to come with me on a round of visits. It would be an eye-opener for a wealthy young sprig like you. Why, if I had ten dollars a day to spend on special diet, stimulants, and the like, I could get through every cent of the money."

"Sorry I haven't time today for slumming. Goodby. I may not see you again for quite awhile."

"Going abroad?"

"Yes; but my plans are indefinite."

"Well, young man, when you come back to Colorado, bring a wife, or, better still, look around for one before you go."

"I'll think it over. But I must be off. I'm due at my lawyer's."

"Those fellows who rake in gold by the bushel are all alike," grumbled Stearn, when the door had closed on his visitor. "I did imagine, after what he had said, that he would skin a fifty off his wad for the benefit of the poor bedridden devils on my list. Ah, well! They'll miss his mother at Bison. And what

did he mean by his questions? On my honor, he struck me as slightly cracked."

A fortnight later, when Power was far beyond the reach of thanks, the cashier of Smith & Moffat's bank sent a formal little note, stating that he was instructed by Mr. John Darien Power to hand him (Dr. Stearn) one hundred dollars on the first of every month during the next seven years, "for the benefit of the sick poor in your district, and in memory of Mary Elizabeth Power." If the doctor would kindly call, etc.

Stearn rubbed his chin thoughtfully. "Oh," said he, to himself, "is *that* what he was after? Well, it's a lesson, even to a grayhead like me. I misjudged him shockingly."

That same period of seven years proved a stumbling-block to others beside the gruff but kind-hearted medico. Peter MacGonigal, for one, was "dog-goned eternally" when he heard of it. A lawyer and two bankers, one from Denver and another from New York, were appointed trustees of Power's estate, real and personal, and the arrangement was partly explained to Mac and Jake, so that they might understand how their interests would be safeguarded. On that historic occasion Jake's real name was disclosed. Hitherto, no one in Bison believed that he possessed a surname; but, under pressure, he "allowed" he was "riz" in Texas, and his father's name was James Cutler.

The arrangement was that MacGonigal should control the mine and Jake the ranch for seven years. If Power did not return about the end of that time, and both men were living, a further six months should be allowed to pass, and then ranch would become the

owner of the respective properties under highly favorable terms.

"I may as well say that I shall come back right enough," said Power, smiling at their bewilderment. "I am only settling matters now to please my lawyer, who wants to avoid a suit for intestacy, or a long argument to presume my death in case I am not heard of again. That is all."

"Is it?" gasped MacGonigal.

"Yes. In any event, neither of you will be a loser."

"But whar in hell air you goin', Derry?"

This, from the man who never swore, was electrical. Jake said afterward that he felt his hair "stannin' right up on end."

"I am undertaking a quest," said Power seriously.

"An' what the— Gosh! I'll bust! What's a 'quest,' anyhow?"

"In this instance, it implies a pilgrimage in far lands. Don't ask me anything else, Mac, because I shall not answer."

"You'll be needin' a plug or two, maybe?" put in Jake anxiously.

"If I do, I'll send word."

They could extract no further information. Certain documents were signed with due solemnity, and the conclave broke up. The three trustees took the opportunity offered by Power's departure for the town to sound Dacre, who was present, as to their client's intentions. But he, as a loyal friend, though greatly in Power's confidence, could not reveal his motives; while, as to his plans, he was free to admit, quite can-

didly, that he had not the slightest notion of their nature. Thus, Bison awoke one morning to find that its chief citizen had left the place overnight. It was only by degrees that the inhabitants discovered how thoroughly he had inquired into and anticipated local needs. Means were forthcoming for every judicious social enterprise. The man had gone; but his money remained.

Dacre accompanied him to Denver. They separated on a platform of the station at the foot of 17th Street, and, at the twelfth hour, the Englishman made a last effort to dissuade his friend from embarking on what he regarded as a fantastic adventure.

"I don't know where you are heading for, Power," he said. "You have not told me, and I can only suppose you mean to be lost to the world."

"Something like that," and Power smiled frankly. His face no longer wore the hunted, harassed aspect of a man who finds the unhappiness of life almost unbearable. A new look had come into his eyes. He seemed to be gazing constantly at some far horizon not bounded by earth and sky, a dim, sunless line beyond which lay a mysterious land of peace, a kingdom akin to Nirvana, the realm of extinction.

"Shall I not hear from you, even once a year?"

"It is improbable," was the grave answer.

"But I refuse to believe that you and I are parting now forever."

"If Providence wills it, we shall meet again. I hope so. If ever I find myself back in the crowded highway, I shall look for you."

"Can't I induce you, even now, to come with me to

England? I'm tired of globe-trotting. You would find my place in Devonshire a quiet nook."

"I'll come to you sometime."

Then, greatly daring, Dacre urged a plea so cruelly direct that he had not ventured to use it before this final moment.

"Have you reflected as to the effect of this action of yours on Nancy when she hears of it?" he said. "I may run up against her. There are only ten thousand of us, you know. She will surely ask me what has become of you. What am I to tell her?"

Power had not spoken of Nancy during a month or more, and his friend thought that a sudden thrusting of her image before his eyes would startle him out of the semihypnotic condition in which he appeared to exist. But, to Dacre's chagrin and astonishment, the ruse failed utterly. Power evidently found the point thus unexpectedly raised somewhat perplexing.

"Tell her?" he repeated, in a most matter-of-fact tone. "Is it necessary to tell her anything? But, of course, you will say you saw the last of me, and a woman hates to be ignored, even by the man she has discarded. Tell her, then, that in India there are Hindus of devout intent who measure two thousand miles of a sacred river by prostrations along its banks. These devotees have done no wrong to any human being, and their notion of service is sublimely ridiculous. But if, among them, was a poor wretch who had committed an unforgivable crime, and *he* thought to expiate it by carrying sharp flints on which to fling himself each yard of the way, one could understand *him*."

"That is no message to Nancy," persisted Dacre.

"If she pouts, and says so, remind her of my mother's death."

"Oh, I shall leave you in anger if you talk in that way."

"No, you won't. You're really more than a little sorry for me. You think, perhaps, I am rather mad; but, on reflection, you will be pleased at that, because a lunatic can be contented in his folly, and I know you wish me content. Here's my train. San Francisco is a great jumping-off place. 'Last seen in San Francisco' is quite a common headline in the newspapers. Goodby! I'll look you up in Devonshire, never fear. Mind you are there to receive me."

And he was gone. Dacre turned his face to the east. During the long journey to Washington, where he meant to visit some friends before crossing the Atlantic, he thought often of Power. Speaking of him one day to a man of some influence in the Department of State, he inquired if there were any means of keeping track of the wanderer without his cognizance.

"Yes," said the official. "We can send out a private consular note. Have you any idea which way he is heading?"

"Not the faintest. From a sort of hint he let drop, he may intend joining a Buddhist community in India or Ceylon. At any rate, he had been reading some book on India. But the assumption is too vague to be of value."

"Well, I'll see what can be done."

By the next mail, every United States consulate in

the world was asked to report to Washington if John Darien Power, an American citizen, appeared within its jurisdiction. No report ever arrived. Long before the inquiry reached the one consul who might have learned something of his whereabouts, Power had vanished off the map; a phrase which, in this instance, happened to be literally true. Thus, Dacre's well-meant efforts to keep in touch with his friend were frustrated, and, for the time, he drops out of this history.

When Power arrived in San Francisco, though his definite project as to the future involved a long disappearance from the haunts of civilized men, he had not decided where to pitch his tent. He had actually thought, as Dacre surmised, of going to the inner fastnesses of the Himalayas; but his voluntary exile connoted something more than mere effacement—it meant suffering, and sacrifice, and the succor of earth's miserable ones—and the barrier of language shut out the East. Again, there was little, if any, element of danger attached to a sojourn in the hilly solitudes of Hindustan; it even appealed to his student's proclivities. So, for that reason alone, it was dismissed. Spanish was the only foreign tongue he was thoroughly conversant with, and his thoughts turned to Spanish-speaking South America. He made up his mind to go there, and search for his field.

San Francisco was the city of his childhood. In happier conditions, it could hardly fail to evoke pleasant memories. The Moores lived there, and they, aided by a host of oldtime acquaintances, would gladly have made him welcome; but he avoided such snares by driv-

ing straight to the offices of the Pacific Steamship Company, where he ascertained that the mail steamer *Panama* sailed for Valparaiso that day.

He was on board within the hour, and remained in his cabin until the engines started. Then he went on deck, and bade farewell to a land where he had worked, and dreamed, and endured, during the full years of his lost youth. Practically his last intimate glimpse of the West, save for distant views of the California coast, and a fleeting call at San Diego, was obtained when the vessel passed through the Golden Gate. Bitter-sweet recollections warred in heart and brain as he watched the beautiful and well-loved panorama. Every bold promontory and sequestered bay of the miles of narrow straits were familiar to his eyes. If there was aught of weakness in his composition, it must have made its presence felt then; but that there could be any turning back did not even occur to his vague thoughts. He might be moving swiftly into unfathomable night; his action might be deemed either stubborn or irresponsible; he might be regarded as the victim of deep delusion; but at least it must be said of him that he never flinched from the barren outlook or admitted the possibility of retreat. Hitherto love for his mother had exercised the most lasting and salutary influence on his life. The depth and intensity of that love was the gage of his horror when he discovered that he had caused her death. His emotions were incapable of logical analysis. She was dead. His forbidden passion for another woman had killed her. She might have lived seven years. For seven years he would placate her spirit "in weariness and painfulness,

in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness."

His strength was that of the mind. He was of the order of chivalry. His renunciation would have been well understood by a few men who lived and had their being a thousand years ago. In the America of the early '90's, had his undertaking been known, which it was not, nor ever has been till this writing, the heedless majority must have wagged sapient noddles, and cried in chorus, "He is mad!"

. . . . . .

A discriminating purser allotted him to the captain's table, and at dinner that evening he found himself next to a Chilean merchant. This man sat on his left. On the right was an empty chair, which adjoined the commander's position at the head of the table.

The captain greeted him with the ready camaraderie of the sea.

"My ward has not put in an appearance," he said, nodding toward the vacant place. "She can't be ill yet, anyhow; but, like most women, I suppose, she is unpunctual."

"Is lack of punctuality a feminine failing?" said Power, seeing that he was expected to answer.

The sailor laughed. "It is evident you are not a married man, Mr. Power, or you wouldn't need to ask," he said.

"How true!" piped the Chilean, in a singularly high-pitched voice. The people at that end of the table grinned, and the Chilean instantly won a reputation as a humorist. Some days passed before they discovered that he had brought off his only joke thus early in the

voyage. He possessed a fund of information about nitrate and guano; but these topics were not popular, so his conversational talent exhausted itself in that one comment. On this occasion it happened to be appropriate.

Power, who had summed him up as a dull dog at a glance, was surveying him with a degree of surprise when he became aware that the missing lady had arrived. She had slipped into her chair quietly, and was apologizing for being late.

"I am usually a most methodical person," she said; "but I mislaid a key——"

She broke off, in smiling embarrassment, because of the general laughter, and the captain had to explain that the wretched males present had been vilifying her sex.

"There was one exception, though," he rattled on. "Our friend on your left seemed to think otherwise. Mr. Power, let me introduce you to Miss Marguerite Sinclair."

Yielding to convention—most potent of human ties—Power turned with a polite bow; but not even his preoccupied mind was proof against the feeling of stupefaction caused by his first impression of the captain's "ward." She certainly owned a girlish and graceful figure, and her brown hair was glossy and abundant; but her skin was withered, and that side of her face which was visible bore a number of livid scars. It was impossible to determine her age. The slim, willowy body and really beautiful hair apparently indicated youth; but the appalling disfigurement of the face, which extended from the top of the cheek to the slender

column of her neck, simply forbade any accurate estimate. The pity of it was that her profile was faultless, and a little pink shell of an ear was almost fantastically opposed to the shriveled and scar-seamed features adjoining it. Yet, in some indescribable way, she reminded him of Nancy, and the notion was so grotesque and abhorrent that he shuddered.

Luckily, her attention was drawn for a moment by a steward, and he had recovered his wits before she looked at him. Then he found that her eyes were peculiarly brilliant. He noted, with positive relief, that they were not blue, like Nancy's, but brown. They had a curiously penetrative quality, too, which seemed to dispel the repugnant effect of the accident. He saw now that she must have sustained some grave injury, which marred her good looks.

"Thank you," she said composedly. "Usually, I have to fight my own battles. It will be quite a relief to count on an ally so valiant that he draws the sword without waiting to see the person whose cause he espouses."

Her voice was cultured and incisive. It seemed to offer a challenge to all the world; yet it held an arresting note of cheerful irony that betokened an equable temperament. After the first shock of surprise, almost of dismay, had passed, Power fancied that she carried herself thus bravely as a protest against the brutality of fate.

They spoke but little during the progress of the meal, and he avoided looking at her. Somehow, he was aware that she would resent such delicacy; but the alternative of a too curious inspection was distasteful.

Of two evils he chose the less; though the fact that any choice was called for in the matter was embarrassing.

He gathered that the captain and Miss Sinclair were old acquaintances. There were allusions to relatives and friends. She was addressed as "Meg." It was to be inferred that her mother was dead, that she had been attending a session of the Los Angeles University, and that she was now on the way to rejoin her father.

Some man at the table spoke of the pending Presidential campaign, and the "sixteen to one" currency ratio started a lively argument. An advocate of a gold basis snorted derisively that silver could be mined profitably at eighteen cents an ounce.

"How true!" said the Chilean, and again he scored.

Power escaped to the deck. He lit a cigar, and leaned on the starboard rail, gazing at a magnificent sunset which glorified the infinity of waters. He wished now he had avoided a mail steamer, with its elaborate elegancies. Had he not acted so precipitately he could have sought the rough hospitality of some grimy tramp, whence woman was barred, and whose skipper would leave him in peace.

Suddenly he was disturbed by Miss Sinclair, who joined him at the rail with a quiet confidence of demeanor that spoke volumes for her self-possession.

"Though I appeared to make light of it at the moment, I was glad to hear that you defended me," she said, smiling at him with those lustrous, deep-seeing eyes.

He was rendered nearly tongue-tied by confusion; but managed to blurt out, awkwardly enough, that his

championship had been involuntary. She laughed quite pleasantly.

"Does that mean that, now you have seen me, you deem me capable of any inquity?" she said.

"You give me credit for a faculty of divination which I do not possess," he retorted, wondering if she was really alluding to her own unsightliness.

"Ah, I think I shall like you," she said. "Most people whom I meet for the first time try to show their pity by being sympathetic. They simply daren't say, 'Good gracious! what has happened to your poor face?' so they put on their best hospital-ward-visitor air, and feel so sorry for me that I want to smack them. Now, you admit candidly that I may be as villainous as I look, and such honesty is a positive relief."

"Even to earn your good opinion I refuse to accept that unfair reading of my words," he said.

"Then what did you mean?"

"I'm afraid I was talking at random."

"You don't look that sort of person. Really, Mr. Power, you and I will get on famously together if we tell each other the real truth. Are we to be fellow-passengers as far as Valparaiso?"

"Yes."

"There, you see! Those other Philistines would have smirked and said, 'I hope so.' I shall enjoy this trip. Generally, a sea-voyage bores me."

"Are you much traveled, then?"

"I live in Patagonia."

"Does that statement answer my question?"

"Well, yes. No one lives in Patagonia for amusement, and some among those who are compelled to re-

side there get away as often as their means permit. Patagonian boarding-houses don't advertise 'young and musical society,' I assure you. Our population is something under one to the square mile."

"My knowledge of the Patagonian is limited; but I have always understood that he requires just about that amount of space."

"Ah, no! Our poor giants are nearly extinct. There is hardly a hundred of them, all told."

"My! Who, or what, cleared them out?"

"Measles. Just imagine a Brobdingnagian measle!"

"Are you, then, a type of the present inhabitants?"

"No. My ailment was due to being knocked insensible during a fire."

Power reddened. "You are an adept in twisting the sense of the most commonplace remarks, to say the least," he said, careless whether or not he annoyed her.

She parried this thrust with sublime unconcern: "I know. It's horrid. But I had to tell you. Now I'll be good, and take myself off. You'll be heartily sick of my company after five thousand miles of it."

Certainly Miss Marguerite Sinclair's unusual methods of expressing herself struck a jarring note, and, whether by chance or by the exercise of rare intuition, the one note able to penetrate Power's armor of indifference. Her somewhat bizarre personality was vivid in his mind long after she had left him; but night and the stars brought other thoughts, and blurred the sharp lines of the vignette.

Next morning he breakfasted early, and alone. After a long tramp on the upper deck, he asked a steward where a deck-chair ordered overnight had been placed.

The man inquired his name, consulted a list, and led him through the music-room to the port side. The chair stood aft of the companionway, and it was irritating to find the neighboring chair occupied by a young and remarkably pretty woman, who seemed to be deeply engrossed in a book.

"I prefer the starboard side," he said sharply. "Bring it along, and I'll show you where to put it."

The lady lifted her eyes to his in an amused, sidelong glance.

"Good-morning, Mr. Power," she said. "You are pardoned for thinking there is a conspiracy floating around; but there isn't."

Power was staggered; but he did not mean to provide a permanent target for the shafts of Miss Marguerite Sinclair's wit. At present she was treating him as though she were "rotting" some small schoolboy.

"Leave the chair—I have changed my mind," he said, and dismissed the steward with a tip. Then he sat down, and scrutinized the girl so brazenly that her eyes fell, and she blushed.

"There is no help for it," he explained. "I suppose we ought to be able, at least, to recognize each other when we meet."

"I should know you again in twenty years; you are not a two-faced person, like me," she retorted.

"It is consoling to find that you can be as unfair to yourself as you were to me last night."

"Would you have me twist my neck like a parrot, and say, 'Please look on this picture, not on that,' when a stranger happens to be to port instead of to starboard?"

"I do really think it would be worth while," he said.

He saw now that she was a girl of twenty or thereabouts, and a singularly attractive one from this new point of view. He felt that he must atone for the curt order to the steward; but she only laughed at the implied compliment.

"The poor fellow saw us talking together, and arranged the chairs accordingly," she said. "I'm frankly pleased, and you say you are; so that's all right. Let us swap symptoms, as grand folk do in society. I have told you how I secured my keepsake. How did you acquire a limp?"

"By lying too long in one position," he replied, unconsciously emulating her flippancy.

"Dear me! Why didn't you try some other sort of lie?"

"Because I was pinned down to the original statement by a ton of rock."

"I should have thought that the noise would have waked you up."

"That remark is a trifle too subtle for my dull wits."

"I watched you strolling about this morning, and decided that you were walking in your sleep."

"You shouldn't jump at conclusions. If I judged you by your pointed style of speech, I might regard you as a new species of porcupine."

"Good!" she said approvingly. "I was sure we'd become friends. I wish my father knew you. He would like you."

"Taking a line through you, may I say that the liking would be mutual?"

"Are you, by any chance, thinking of visiting Patagonia?"

"No," he said.

For some reason, hard to define, he was convinced that Patagonia, though reported barren, would prove a rather unsuitable place for an anchorite.

"Are you interested in mines?" she inquired, after a pause.

"Yes."

"What sort of mines, copper or silver?"

"Neither."

"Really, you are most informing."

"I beg your pardon," he said hurriedly. "My mind wandered for the moment. I was thinking how extraordinary it was that a young lady should hit on my profession so promptly."

"No marvel at all. Rocks fall mostly on miners."

"An excellent example of ratiocinative reasoning."

"Don't imagine you can crush me with a word weighing a ton. Dad and I practise them on each other. They keep our brains from rusting, a common enough process on a ranch. Have you ever lived on one?"

He stirred uneasily. Evidently, Patagonia shared certain characteristics with Colorado. Those absurdly shrewd eyes of hers missed nothing.

"Have I stuck another quill into you?" she went on. "If so, it was an involuntary effort."

"As it happens, I do live—I mean, I have lived—

on a ranch. I own one; but it contains a gold mine. So, you see, your divination is almost uncanny."

"I am still guessing why you are coming to South America. Don't tell me if you prefer to make a mystery of your intentions."

"Will you be vexed if I avail myself of your offer, and remain silent?"

"Vexed? I shall be delighted. It is a positive joy to meet a man who had rather appear uncivil than coin a polite fib. The most truthful of men lie glibly to girls. They think it is good for us. Now, I regard you as a person who hates deceit in either man or woman."

He turned and stared at her fixedly. "May I ask how old you are?" he said abruptly.

"Nineteen."

"You talk like a woman of forty, and a wise one at that."

"I was grown-up at seven. At twelve I got that crack on the head I told you of last night, when our homestead was attacked and burnt by drunken Indians——"

"Are there Indians of that sort in Patagonia?" he broke in.

"Fifty-seven varieties—all bad. Some have souls, I believe; others rank lower than the beasts. But what have I said now?" for he had sprung upright as if in a great hurry to get away.

"Forgive me," he muttered. "I have just remembered some important letters I must write before we call at San Diego."

"So," she communed, when he had vanished through the companion-hatch, "even Mr. John Darien Power can prevaricate at times. But he is a nice man. I wonder why some woman treated him badly. It must have been a woman. If it were a man, he wouldn't have run!"

The two became firm friends. As the days passed, and the *Panama* plodded south through tropic seas, Power learned so many details of the girl's life that he could have written her biography. Her father was an Englishman, who found a wife in Los Angeles. After being swindled by a nitrate company, he had the good fortune to recover from the assets a tract of land in the Chubut Territory of Patagonia. It contained no nitrate; but the discovery that it would grow good cattle came in the nick of time to save him from ruin. His wife was killed in the Indian raid which had left its disastrous record on his daughter; but Argentine troops had exterminated the Araucanian tribe responsible for the outrage, a rare event in that district, and the ranch had prospered. Each year or eighteen months Marguerite visited her maternal relatives in Los Angeles, and worked hard at the university for a term. By that device, it was evident, Sinclair salved certain twinges of conscience for keeping her bright intelligence pent in a Patagonian ranch. The two hated these breaks in their home life. However, they provided a middle way; so father and daughter made the best of them.

Although the eastern route, via New York, was quicker, the girl herself elected for the long sea voyage down the Chile coast, and through the Straits of Ma-

gellan. She knew most of the ships plying in those waters, and felt more at home in them.

She was a prime favorite on board the *Panama*—among the men; her sharp tongue and amazing outspokenness did not endear her to the women. Some of them resented her popularity, and tried to snub her, and the result was a foregone conclusion. Quite unconsciously, Power caused one of these brief combats. A pretty, but vapid, and rather rapid lady from Iquique thought that a good-looking young man like the American was devoting far too much time to Miss Sinclair, and resolved to detach him.

She failed lamentably, and, in her pique, so far forgot herself as to inquire sarcastically what magnetic influence the girl exerted that she was able to keep Power in constant attendance.

Marguerite surveyed her rival with bland unconcern. "You are mistaken," she cried. "He cares nothing for women's society."

The other thought she saw an opening, and struck viciously. "So it would appear," she smirked. "You are the only woman on the ship he has spoken to."

"Yes. Odd, isn't it?"

"Distinctly so. Perhaps he is one of those rare mortals who really believe that beauty is only skin deep."

"How consoling that great and original thought must be for you!"

"For me? Why for me?"

"Because, like charity, beauty covers a multitude of sins."

Someone overheard this passage at arms. The quip held a barbed shaft which flew far, even unto Iquique, and the Chilean merchant regained lost ground when he heard of it by exclaiming, "How true!"

But, strive as she might, and did, Marguerite never received any confidences from Power. They talked about many things; but his past history remained a closed volume. The long, hot days succeeded one another with monotonous regularity. When the red cliffs of Valparaiso appeared beneath the snow-crowned line of the Andes, those two, perhaps, were the only people on the ship who regretted that the voyage was at an end.

"So we part here," said the girl, as Power found her waiting near the gangway to go ashore in the tender.

"Yes," he said. "When you are older you will realize that life consists largely of partings."

"I know that now," she said. She was wearing a white double veil, which was her habit when in towns, so he could not see that she was very pale. He was aware of an irksome pause—a rare thing as between Marguerite Sinclair and himself.

"You go straight to your new steamer, I believe?" he went on, forcing the conversation.

"Yes. And you?"

"I drift into a hotel for a couple of days."

"And I cannot tempt you to visit my poor but proud Patagonia?"

"I fear not."

"Goodby, Mr. Power."

She shook hands with him hurriedly, and joined the

crush of passengers in the gangway. She moved with the easy grace of one who lived much in the open air. For the hundredth time she reminded him of Nancy. He sighed. At last his seven years' pilgrimage had really begun!

CHAPTER XIV

THE WANDER-YEARS

If this record were a story of romantic adventure, it might well start from the moment Power set foot in the hotel which a relative of an eminent French actress used to keep in Valparaiso. He had not been in the city many hours before a brutal assault on a woman led him to intervene. During the resultant scuffle he was robbed of his pocketbook, and, in addition to a narrow escape from being knifed, he was informed by a supercilious policeman that the whole affair, including the screams of a female apparently in fear of her life, had been cleverly engineered for the express purpose of relieving him of his money.

When settling his affairs at Bison he had arranged that the bulk of his revenues should be lodged with his New York bankers, to whom letters and communications of every sort were to be sent. To provide against the unforeseen—a word of wide significance when applied to the vortex into which he was plunging—it was understood that a cablegram in his name would be acted on only if it bore the code-word "Bido," a simple composite of the first syllables of Bison and Dolores, and, had it not been for the lucky chance that the bulk of his available ready money, some five thousand dollars, was safe in his room at the hotel, he might have

been compelled to reveal his whereabouts to the bank forthwith.

Then, a Chilean gentleman, impressed by the fact that Power was an American, and therefore a millionaire, tried to extract gold from him by the safer and really more effective method of selling him a guano island. Singularly enough, this second thief's pertinacity opened up the narrow and hazardous path for which Power was looking. The captain of a small steamer engaged in the guano trade went out of his way to warn the American that he was being exploited by a scoundrel. Such disinterested honesty in a Chilean was attractive. Some talk followed, and, three days after arriving in Valparaiso, Power quitted that lively city as a passenger on board the *Carmen*, bound for islands in the south.

The friendly skipper had no inkling of his new acquaintance's intentions. He thought that the señor was veritably a speculator in guano, who, all the better-known deposits off the coast of Peru being either taken up or exhausted, was bent on exploiting fresh fields in Chile. This much is certain. Had Captain Malaspina realized that this well-spoken and pleasant-mannered stranger meant to throw in his lot with the savage race which infests the inhospitable islands and rock-strewn channels of the wildest coast in the world, he would have regarded him as a lunatic. He could never guess that his own blood-curdling yarns of these outcasts added fuel to the fire of Power's strange enthusiasm. He believed that the Indians were cannibals. He had seen them living and eating in the interior of a putrid whale. He had found a five-year-old boy lying on the

rocks with his brains dashed out, and was told that the child's father had shown his anger in that way because the victim dropped some edible seaweed which the man had been at some pains to gather. Mere words could not describe the brutes. The worthy skipper always spat when he spoke of them.

His gruesome stories beguiled a slow voyage while the leaky boilers of the *Carmen*, iron steamship, of five hundred tons, pushed her sluggishly through the long rollers of the Pacific. Then a heavy sou'westerly gale sprang up, and the *Carmen* staggered for refuge into the Corcovado Gulf, and thence plashed and wallowed through the sheltered Moraleda Channel. To eke out her scanty stock of coal she put into the estuary of the Aisen River, where Malaspina bargained with Indians for a supply of wood.

Power saw his opportunity, and seized it eagerly. He asked to be put ashore for a couple of days in order that he might study the natives at close quarters. The friendly skipper was unwilling, arguing that a tribe of monkeys would better repay investigation, but ultimately yielded to pressure. There was really no great risk, he knew, because Chilean gunboats had taught these coast Indians to leave white men alone; so Power was landed, his total equipment being a small medicine chest, a hut, a folding bed, some few stores, and a shotgun, with a hundred cartridges, all told. He took more food than such a brief stay demanded; but the necessity of placating the head men of the village supplied a plausible excuse. A couple of silver dollars proved an irresistible bribe to a Spanish-speaking Indian who promised to guide him into the interior, and

a letter to the amazed skipper of the *Carmen* saved the villagers from reprisals.

"I am sorry I was compelled to mislead you [he wrote]; but I mean to explore the Andes at this point, and I prefer to set out on a crazy project without undergoing the protests and dissuasion I should certainly have met with from the kind friend you have proved yourself. If all is well with you seven years from this date, write to me, care of the National Bank, New York. I will surely answer."

"Seven years!" shouted Malaspina, shaking a huge fist at the silent hills. "Seven devils! He is mad, mad! There will be an inquiry by the American consul, and I shall be accused of killing him. Holy Virgin! What a fool I was to let him go alone!"

He was minded to flog an Indian or two, and thus extract information; but calmer counsels prevailed. After all, he had a letter proving that Power had left the ship voluntarily. At first he resolved to report the astounding incident on returning to Valparaiso, and discussed the matter volubly with José, second in command. José said, "No. Let sleeping dogs lie. Those foreign consuls are plaguy fellows. They get many a poor man hanged just to please their governments."

Malaspina had been well paid, of course; so he decided to hold his tongue, keeping the letter, in case——

Thus was the trail lost. Power was buried alive.

The guide led him twenty miles up the valley of the Aisen, and handed him over to the members of another tribe, describing him as a harmless moon-gazer. In a hovel lay an elderly Indian, shivering with fever. Power dosed the quaking wretch with calomel and

quinine, and performed a miracle. Thenceforth his life was safe; as long as the few ounces of quinine and calomel lasted, at any rate. He had landed in the Chile region at the beginning of spring, and his nomad hosts moved nearer the Andes when the weather improved, taking him with them. Their barbarous tongue included a number of Spanish words, and by slow degrees he learned their comparatively small but curiously inflected vocabulary. Once he could make himself understood, the foundations of his mission were laid securely. By sheer initiative, having no training in such arts beyond the knowledge acquired by most intelligent men, he taught them how to spin and weave the long hair of the Chilean goat. He established some principles of communal law. He showed them how to use nitrate as a fertilizer. He experimented with medicinal herbs when his own small store of drugs had given out. He got them to build better huts, and adopt some elementary principles of sanitation. Tillage and crops broke down the migratory habit. Land was cleared, and drained or irrigated as needed. For the first time in its history, the tribe lived in permanent dwellings. In a word, Power established a state.

Within four years he had elevated these apemen and women to a standard so far above that of their neighbors that his fame spread into unknown fastnesses of the Cordillera. Among his adopted people he would have been worshiped as a god if he had not sternly repressed any such tendencies. But he could not stop the growth of his reputation as a magician, and a well-planned raid by another tribe brought about the slaughter of a section of the community and his own capture.

He was reduced now to the direst misery. His captors, some degrees cruder and more bestial than the men he was governing, took him by forced marches across a spur of the Andes, giving him food of such revolting nature that he became deadly ill. At last they were compelled to carry him, and, using such limited reasoning faculties as they possessed, allowed him to save his life by cooking and eating portions of animals freshly killed. Their object in making him a prisoner, he gathered, was to divert his magic to their own district so that his incantations might increase their herds. When he failed to accomplish this laudable purpose offhand, they became violent, and threatened to burn him alive. On the homeopathic principle, an abnormally dry and scorching spring came to his rescue. Some species of noxious insect, whose bite was fatal to horses and cattle, multiplied exceedingly, and the tribe lost half their stock. A wily candidate for the chiefship spread the notion that the white god had caused this misfortune, and that the person who really ought to be burnt alive was the chief who counseled the raid. This was duly done, and heavy rain fell that night, effectually disposing of the insect pests.

The new chief, who would have been an acquisition to certain political circles in more temperate climes, saw that, although he had scored heavily, the dangerous wonder-worker might be associated with evils yet to come; so, on his suggestion, Power was taken through the mountains by a secret pass, and left on the eastern slopes of the range to fare as best he might.

The Indians were afraid to gratify their instincts

by murdering him outright; but, seeing that he was absolutely unarmed, and without a scrap of food in his possession, there was no misunderstanding the malevolent grin with which their leader pointed out the path he must follow. These very aborigines, despite their animal lore concerning edible roots, and their readiness to dispute with vultures for a carrion meal, knew that no man could traverse those leagues of foothills without arms and a commissariat of some kind. No semblance of a track existed. Power and his guards stood on a scree of loose stones and shale not far below the snow line, and well above the first precipitous valley in which even the hardiest pines reached a stunted growth. The steep hillside was covered with the strange snow shapes known to Spanish South America as penitentes, weird wraiths like sheeted ghosts, and more than one broad track torn through these awesome sentinels showed where avalanches of rocks and ice had thundered down from the heights that very day.

Power looked out over the appalling vista of barren hills and tree-choked ravines which lay in front. In the direction shown by the Indian he saw a slight depression in an otherwise unbroken ring of unscalable mountains, and it was reasonable to assume that the milk-white glacier stream flowing through a canyon a thousand feet beneath must find its way to the sea through that gap. It was so long since he had glanced at a map of South America that he had only the vaguest notion of his whereabouts. As a rough guess, beyond those tremendous highlands lay the plains of Lower Argentina—the black, wind-swept, semidesert pampas. At the lowest calculation, he was three hundred and

fifty miles from the Atlantic, and fifty of those miles offered such difficulties to man's endeavor that well-equipped expeditions had turned back time and again from attempts to find new passes through the Andes in that region.

To try and reach the eastern coast meant almost certain death; but the scowling faces of the Indians showed that the effort must be made, unless he was prepared to fall under their weapons then and there. The uncouth tongue he had acquired on the Trans-Andean slope was not of much avail with his present custodians; but, when he asked the leader of the party for a spear, he was understood.

By nothing less, in Power's view, than the direct intervention of Providence, the man was minded to treat the matter as a joke, and handed over his own spear, a nine-foot shaft of tough and limber hickory, tipped with a flat blade of iron about eight inches in length and two in width at its widest part. A stout shank was gripped by the split wood, and strongly bound in its socket with a thong of hide. Singularly enough, these savages had never searched their prisoner's pockets. Probably, they were afraid to touch him, lest he laid some evil spell on them; so he was able now to produce a silver dollar, which he gave with a smile, indicating, at the same time, his willingness to purchase a couple of strips of the dried meat carried by some members of the escort.

This request was refused peremptorily, and a distinctly threatening gesture warned Power that the parley was at an end. He turned resolutely toward the rising sun, and began his lonely and affrighting

Odyssey. He admitted afterward that he knew what fear meant during the first few strides across the broken ground, because he was suspicious lest the Indians might have planned to spear him from behind. Indeed, some such barbaric pleasantry may have occurred to them. A fierce clamor of talk broke out suddenly; but a swirl of snow swept down from a neighboring glacier, and even these hardy savages had no desire to be caught on that dangerous scree in a snowstorm. So the hubbub died away as quickly as it had arisen.

Fortunately, the snow did not fall so thickly as to be actually blinding. The hapless fugitive could discern his bearings, and he moved as speedily as possible to a point he had already fixed on as being out of the track of avalanches. He reached this landmark, a hump of rock, and perforce remained in its shelter till the weather cleared. During this vigil he heard the dull roar and rumble of falling débris, and, when the snow-shower ceased, he saw that two fresh lanes had been plowed through the serried ranks of the penitentes. Of the Indians there was neither sight nor sound.

It was then about noon on a spring day. He had not troubled to keep any reckoning of the calendar; but he knew that the month was late October or early November. So there still remained six or seven hours of practicable daylight, and he resolved to push on boldly, and reach a less perilous altitude before night fell.

He had two vital problems to solve. The first was the food difficulty; the second, to find a road where road there was none. The awful solitudes of the higher

Andes and the dank forests which cumber the lateral valleys are singularly devoid of animal and bird life. It is a land of decay and death. The very hills disintegrate so rapidly that rivers which flow into the Pacific in one century may empty themselves into the Atlantic in the next. The constant falling away of precipices, and the luxuriant growth of trees and brushwood amid a tangle of rotting timber, render continuous advance by way of the ravines absolutely impossible. Hence, his only chance of escape lay in keeping to the highlands, trusting to luck and the lie of the land when an occasional crossing of a canyon became necessary in order to avoid doubling on his tracks and being driven back to the white wilderness of the inner chain.

Happily, he was better equipped than most men for an undertaking which was almost comparable with the plight of an explorer lost in the Arctic. Though enfeebled by his recent illness, and already in need of a meal, four years of exposure to hardships which would have killed a weakling, and daily living in the open in the worst of weather, had hardened his frame and toughened his constitution to that degree of fortitude with which Greek historians loved to invest Mithridates Eupator. Moreover, he was suitably clothed in skins, and his feet were incased in moccasins. Above all, his was an equable heart. Death had hovered near many a time and oft during those wild wander-years. He had heard the very fluttering of its sable pinions when he turned his back on the pitiless Indians; but he was firmly resolved not to lose faith while he could stand square on his feet. Time enough to lie

down and die when movement was no longer possible. Meanwhile, he would struggle on.

Progress, of course, was slow. Every yard of the way was difficult, every second yard hazardous. As an alpenstock, the spear was invaluable. But for its aid he would have slipped and fallen a dozen times on that treacherous mountainside. After a couple of miles of fairly straight going, he was faced by the need of crossing to another range. Choosing a line which seemed practicable, he climbed down a broken rock face, plunged into the medley of fallen logs which cumbered the nearer slope of the intervening canyon, and ferried a torrent by the precarious bridge of a rotting pine, the only one, among hundreds which had fallen, long enough to reach the opposite bank, and so slender and brittle at its apex that it crumbled beneath him just as he sprang to safety on a rock slippery with spray.

The climb to the open again was exhausting work. Once he thought he was done for when an apparently sound log snapped suddenly, and plunged him into a dark and fearsome network of dead wood, so swathed in soft and noisome fungus growths that he seemed to be unable to find sure hold for either hand or foot. Somehow, he clambered into daylight again, and found himself clinging to the roots of a tree which throve on the tangled husks of its ancestors. It took him three hours to reach a height of five hundred feet, at which point the treacherous forest belt yielded to a firmer area covered by alpine moss.

Then, utterly worn out, and unequal to further effort that day, he was thinking of gnawing some bulbs of

resin which had exuded from the bigger firs, when he caught sight of a small armadillo scuttling over the rocks. It was the first living creature, save for an occasional vulture, he had seen since leaving the snow-line. The discovery brought a spurious energy, and he dashed off in pursuit. The armadillo, which was far removed from its natural habitat—probably owing to the drought in the lowlands—ran very rapidly, and was evidently making for a burrow. Indeed, Power despaired of securing the creature when it headed for a fissure in the ground. As a last resource, he hurled the spear at it. The weapon turned in the air, fell vertically, and buried its broad blade in the animal's neck, striking the only vulnerable part of its body, since the whole remaining structure was covered with a strong, bony case of flexible plates.

The chances against any such haphazard casting of a javelin proving successful were simply incalculable; but Power took this piece of good fortune as further proof that he was being befriended by Providence. Leaving the armadillo where it had fallen, he searched the crevices in which it was about to seek refuge, and obtained some handfuls of dry moss. Then he gathered a bundle of the driest sticks he could find, and, by using a flint and steel, which, in his case, had long ago superseded all other means of lighting a fire, was soon enjoying a meal the like to which no chef in Paris could have prepared that night. True, there were but one course and one sauce; but the joint was eatable, with something of a pork flavor, and the sauce was ravenous hunger. Only the other day he told the most famous of contemporary head waiters that roast

armadillo was vastly superior to sucking pig, at which the eminent one smiled, realizing that his patron was no gourmet.

Covering the remains of the feast with the creature's own armor, which, as an extra precaution against vultures, he weighted down with stones, Power arranged a bed of moss under an overhanging rock, and lay down to sleep. A wild storm of wind and rain raged during the night; but he was merely awaked for a minute or two by the unusual clamor, and slept soundly again, despite the fury of the elements. At dawn he was astir, and, after eating a few mouthfuls, tied the rest of the small joints to the spear by their own sinews, and began his march again.

As the armadillo supplied the only food he secured, or could have secured, during six days of a most arduous and nerve-racking advance through a country which offered every sort of obstacle to the explorer, it is not to be wondered at if Power came to believe that he would yet emerge in safety from the perils confronting him. But his rate of movement was exasperatingly slow. On one day of the six he only succeeded in crossing one particularly troublesome ravine. On another, after skirting a mountain slope which positively bristled with dangers, he found himself on a receding angle, and was compelled to retrace his steps; although, a dozen times already, he had been called on to exercise every ounce of strength, every shred of resolution, in order to cross appallingly difficult places which he must now tackle again.

Still, he kept on, and that gap in the hills grew ever wider and more distinct. He was gnawing the last

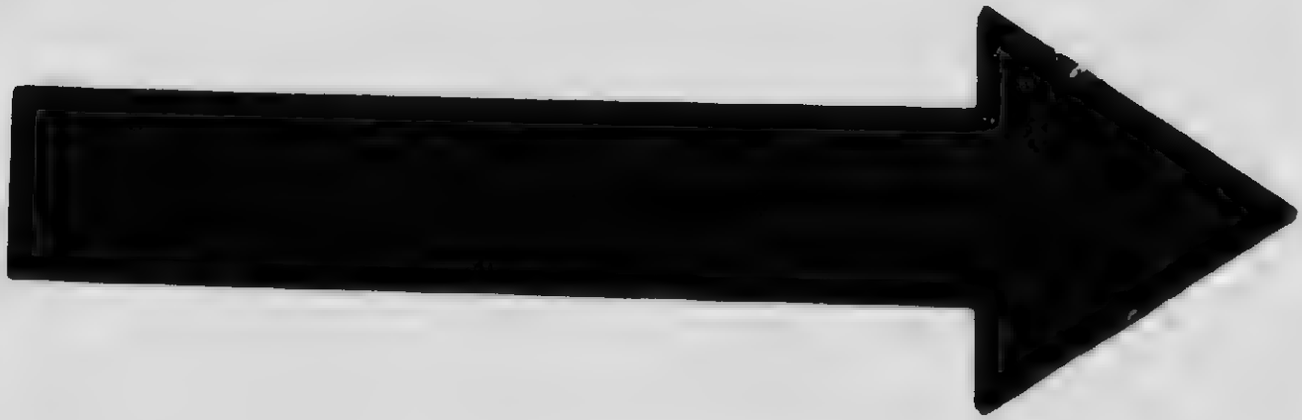
bone of the armadillo, and asking himself how much longer it would be possible to maintain an unequal struggle against the grim forces which sought to crush him, when he had a stroke of luck. The Andes would be even more impregnable than they are were it not for an unusual geological formation which provides broad and often practicable rock ledges along the walls of the worst precipices. Farther north, in Peru, and, to a less extent, in Chile, these roadways of Nature's own contriving are much utilised by mountaineers and their mules. When Power stumbled across one of them after getting out of a specially steep and timber-clogged ravine, he really did believe that his troubles were lessening. He fancied he could discern faint signs of others having passed that way, and he jumped to the conclusion that those most unfriendly Indians knew of this track, and could have piloted him to it in a quarter of the time he had consumed. Obviously, it led in the right direction. After climbing to a dizzy height, it dipped again into the next valley, and, despite a hazardous crossing of a mountain torrent, with complications caused by a recent landslide, he discerned another similar ledge on the opposite hill, and valiantly made for it.

There could be no doubting now that he was entering a more open country. The pass had broadened into a valley, and a flat blue smear on the horizon told of earth and sky meeting beyond a plain. The sight spurred him to a frenzy of hope and effort. He pressed on at far too rapid a pace, and, when hunger gripped him once more, he strove to sate its pangs by munching some dried berries, remnants of last year's autumn,

which he gathered from a deciduous tree. He fancied, judging by the taste, that they were not poisonous; but, perhaps owing to his famished condition, they seemed to induce a curious excitation of mind, accompanied by dilated vision, which rendered colors entrancingly bright and clear. In the valley opening out before the descending ledge he imagined he could see patches of pink blossom which reminded him of the apple orchards of Colorado. He laughed aloud at the fantasy; nevertheless, he tore on in desperate haste to get into that attractive zone, where, surely, there must be animal life, and, with it, the prospect of a meal. Overjoyed, he sang as he went, rousing strange echoes. He, who had dwelt among the heathen like another Xavier, poured out his soul in the lilt and rhythm of "Marching Through Georgia"! That stirring refrain had led many a gallant heart to the "crash of the cannonade and the desperate strife"; but never, surely, has it been heard amid such surroundings. Cliff spoke to cliff. Primeval nature was stirred, and answered his voice in rude harmonies:

"Hurrah! Hurrah! We bring the jubilee!
Hurrah! Hurrah! The flag that makes you free!
So we sang the chorus from Atlanta to the sea,
While we were marching through Georgia."

With a rush of wings and frantic clamor of screams, a flock of upland geese (*Chloëphaga magellanica*) rose from some hidden marsh beneath, and fled in ordered phalanx to some distant sanctuary; whereupon Power yelled that ecstatic "Hurrah!" anew. Here was life!



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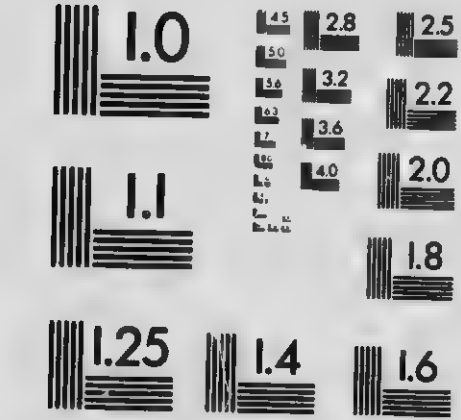

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Here was a world that smiled and was not dumb! He must hurry, hurry, and enter into this Paradise!

Yet it came to pass, as so often happens in the most commonplace phases of man's life, that, at the very moment when the worst stage of the journey was nearing its end, when he had accomplished the almost impossible, when the leaping torrents of the hills were merging into a stream which, if turbid and noisy, bore some semblance to a river, he met with a disaster that brought death even nearer than it had come at any other crisis of his extraordinary career.

The track, rough as it was, offered comparatively easy going. Now winding round the inner curve of some huge fold in the hill, soon it would swing boldly out across the face of a promontory of rock; while passing one of these awesome precipices, which actually jutted out so far beyond its own base that Power could not see the river, though he could hear its mighty voice roaring among bowlders, he fell. That is to say, the broad ledge sank away beneath his feet, and, after a vain spring toward a section which still gripped the rocky wall, he fell with it.

He uttered no cry, made no plaint to Heaven. His brain worked with inconceivable rapidity, and he knew that he had been flung from a sheer height of well over a hundred feet. Thus, unless he dropped into deep water, and managed to retain his senses, either outcome of the accident being wildly improbable, he must be crushed into a pulp when he came to earth. He petitioned the Most High that, if this was death, it might be instantaneous, that his soul might go out of its worn tabernacle in merciful oblivion, that he might

not be called on to lie, maimed and inert, watching the gathering of vultures. Then some mighty hand seemed to seize him in an irresistible grip, and he lost consciousness.

When his senses returned, he found himself staring blankly at a blue sky, a sky that shone gloriously through a fairy lacework of branches of trees laden with apple blossom; while a sweet and subtle scent was pungent in his nostrils, and undoubtedly gave rise to the quaint notion which instantly possessed him, that he was already dead, and translated to a land of everlasting spring. Then he knew that he was still clothed in skins, that his bones ached, that he was hungry and athirst; so this could be neither death nor immortality. Suddenly, a savage face bent over him, his head was lifted, and he was given some liquid. It tasted like cider, and he drank copiously. Then his brain reeled; for he was in no fit condition to withstand a draft of singular potency, and again the mists came, and he lapsed into the void.

He did not recover full consciousness that day. The Indians, who had heard and been amazed at his singing, saw him drop from the precipice, and ran to its base, expecting to find a mangled corpse. But a tall and slender pine had thrust its straight shaft into the stout skin coat he wore, and had bent until it yielded to the strain, and broke. Thus, he fell with enough force to knock the wits out of him; but the major catastrophe was averted, and the Indians were awed by an incident which no patriarch of the tribe had witnessed before, nor would ever see again if he attained the age of Methuselah. The spear, which had left

Power's hand when he was in the air, had buried its eight inches of blade in a fallen treetrunk, and had to be hewed out with an ax.

These things the white necromancer learned afterward. He found also that his vision of apple blossom was no dream, but reality. Three centuries ago Jesuit missionaries had crossed the Andes by that very pass. They brought, as peace offerings to the Indians, some of the fruit-trees and cereals of more favored climes; but they were murdered without parley. Curiosity, perhaps, led the savages to plant the trees and seeds; the apples alone, finding a congenial soil, throve marvelously. All that region abounds in sweet, wild apples, from which the Indians concoct a fermented liquor which they call *chi-chi*. Those same apples, and the orgies of drunkenness to which they give rise, probably account for the legend of a great city existing within the untrodden depths of the Cordillera. But there is no city—no trace of civilization save the apples, a kindly memento of the unfortunate Jesuits.

. . . . . .

And now Power began his regenerative work anew.

Thanks to the phenomenal style of his coming among them, the savages spared his life; but their possession of an almost unlimited stock of *chi-chi*, and the truculent mood which strong drink induces, even in Indians, led them, at first, to treat him as a Kokó-huinché, or "white fool." Though their hunting-grounds were hundreds of miles from the coast, and singularly remote from the influence of white settlers, they were aflame with vague resentment against the invaders, and

gladly made one of the hated race the butt of their malevolent humor.

So Power, in self-defense, took to artifice. He discovered that they possessed two kegs of gunpowder, but owned no guns. He learned, too, that once there had been three kegs, but a careless experiment with one had removed a chief and his family. With some difficulty, and only by tickling their imagination by promising an exhibition of magic, he obtained some of the powder, and, on a dark night, electrified the community by a display of fireworks. Catharine wheels and Roman candles achieved wonders among the foothills of the Andes. From that instant his supremacy was established. A squib or two enforced edicts; a rocket set a constitution squarely on its feet. In less than three years he had become the Indians' trusted guide and teacher. The day came when the store of powder was almost gone; yet he was strong enough to prohibit the manufacture of that season's supply of *chi-chi*.

But there was one thing he could not do. He could not calm these wild people's frenzy when a hunting party came in hot haste from the plains and announced that a cavalcade of white men was forcing a passage along the river, being evidently bent on penetrating the valley of the apple-trees.

Power was asked to repel this invasion by black art; failing which, the Araucanians decided to massacre the explorers in a neighboring canyon. He had not the least doubt as to the success of the scheme. He knew the natural difficulties of the place. The upper end could be barricaded, the lower blocked by spearmen hidden in the dense vegetation, and every intruder

caught in the trap would be battered to death by boulders flung from the crests of opposing precipices.

Very reluctantly the Indians allowed him to act as their ambassador. By sheer force of will he bore down opposition, and was taken to a point whence the smoke of campfires was visible above the trees. It was hard to say whether the faith his friends placed in him was stronger than their fear and loathing of the white strangers; but he exacted a promise that, if he persuaded the members of the expedition to retreat, they would not be molested. Oddly enough, neither he nor the Indians gave a thought to any other possible development. These savages believed that the white god who had dropped upon them from the skies would never leave them, and Power himself had almost forgotten the existence of the outer world. Most certainly, he paid no heed to the fact that his seven years of expiation were nearly sped. He was happy among these simple people. In his way, he was a king, and the habit of ruling had become second nature.

By chance, that day he carried the spear which had been his faithful ally in crossing the Andes, and a weird and barbarous figure he must have presented when he walked into an almost unguarded camp which had been set up for a few hours on the right bank of the river. Clothed in skins, his face bronzed to a deep brown by constant exposure to the elements, his hair falling over his shoulders, and a long beard sweeping to his breast, he looked a veritable wild man of the woods.

A halfbreed peon who was the first to see him whipped out a revolver, and shouted a warning; but Power held his spear crosswise above his head, show-

ing, by this Indian sign, that he came in peace, and he was permitted to approach.

"Where is your leader?" he asked in Spanish.

The peon seemed to be vastly astonished; but he turned to a tall, thin, elderly man who had dived out of a tent at his cry, and now strode forward.

"Where have you come from?" he said; but his speech betrayed him, and Power added to the sensation he had already caused by saying:

"You are no Spaniard, at any rate."

"Good Lord!" cried the other. "It's an Englishman!"

"Next thing to it, an American," said Power.

"What is your name, and how do you happen to be in this outlandish place?" was the bewildered demand.

"I am here to explain all that, and more. Are you the head of this expedition?"

"Yes."

"Well, what about discussing matters in that tent of yours?"

"Come right along," said the stranger, leading the way.

CHAPTER XV

THE NEW LIFE

NEARLY seven years had elapsed since Power had either seen a man of his own race, or heard civilized speech. During all that time, save when he spoke aloud in self-communing, or hummed the half-remembered words of a song, he had neither uttered, nor read, nor written a word of English. One literary treasure, indeed, had come his way, and he made good use of it.

Some men of the tribe, digging one day for truffles, broke into a cave, in which there was a skeleton. Among the bones, wrapped in soft leather and parchment, the Indians found a book, which they brought to their white leader. It was an illuminated Book of Hours, or "Horæ Beatæ Mariæ Virginis," written in Latin and Spanish, and, as Power ascertained subsequently, the work of an Italian of the fifteenth century. No more beautiful example of the exquisite classical Renaissance period could be produced by the Vatican library. The character in the figures and naturalness in the landscapes bespoke a ripe art, and many of the vellum pages were bordered by the solid frame which gives full scope to the artist's fancy by its facilities for the introduction of medallions, vignettes, twisted Lombardic vines, cupids, fawns, colored gems, and birds of brilliant plumage. Veritably, this "Horæ" was more precious than if its leaves were

of solid gold; its value to Power in those lonely hours was of a spring in the desert to a parched traveler.

Despite such an invaluable stimulus to his mind, however, it was almost with difficulty, and certainly with marked hesitancy, that he was able now to arrange the words of a sentence in their ordered sequence, and often he found his tongue involuntarily lending an Indian twist to idiomatic expressions. But his labored utterance was either not so marked as he imagined, or his host was so surprised at meeting a white man so far from civilization that he could not repress his own excitement. At the outset, too, the instinct of hospitality helped to relieve the tension.

"Can I offer you anything in the way of refreshment—some whisky, or tea, or a cigar?" came the courteous inquiry.

"A cigar, by all means. I have not smoked one for so long a time that I have forgotten what it is like."

"It is pretty evident you have been living among the Indians," said the other, passing him a cigar-case. "How in the world did you contrive to get lost in these parts? You did not come through Patagonia, I fancy?"

Power took thought before answering. Some half-atrophied emotion stirred within him.

"Patagonia? Is this country Patagonia?" he said at last.

"Yes. Do you mean to say you don't know that?"

"I had a notion that it was the Argentine. My Indian friends invariably speak of the white inhabitants as Argentinos."

"But how did you get here?"

"By crossing the Andes."

"With a party?"

"No, alone."

His questioner whistled. "By Jove!" he cried, "you had your nerve with you."

"I couldn't help myself. I was a prisoner in the hands of a Trans Andean tribe, and they turned me adrift. I had to win through somehow, or die."

"What's your name, anyhow?"

"John Darien Power."

"Mine's Sinclair—George Sinclair. Well, Mr. Power, this is a fortunate meeting for both of us. You could never have reached the coast if you had not fallen in with just such an outfit as mine, because there are the devil's own breeds of Indians prowling about the last hundred and fifty miles of this river. Luckily, they dare not attack forty well-armed men; but, if looks count, they are willing for the job should an opportunity offer. We simply couldn't secure a guide; so decided to follow the river all the way, especially as it made transport fairly easy, except at the rapids. Now you, on the other hand, can tell us just what we want to know. Is the stream practicable much farther? What sort of country lies between this point and the snow-line?"

"Yes, I can tell you those things, and a good deal more. What is the object of your expedition? Gold?"

Sinclair laughed rather constrainedly. "I suppose that is the bedrock of the proposition," he said. "A bit of science, a bit of prospecting, a last glimpse at a country which is not marked on any map before I leave

Patagonia for good—there you have the scheme in a nutshell."

"Are you willing to turn back now?"

"No. Why should we? We have come close on three hundred miles; another fifty, or less, should see us close to the frontier of Chile."

"But you may sacrifice your lives."

"No Indians can stop us—let me assure you of that, straight away."

"Won't you let me mark your maps? I can supply every detail with sufficient accuracy."

"Allow me to suggest that I am a business man, Mr. Power, and I mean this expedition to pay its way."

"Ah! It is gold you really have in mind, then? But there is no gold."

"Now you are talking nonsense. We have found it."

"You have found alluvial gold. There are few fast-running streams in the world which do not contain gold in that form. The denudation of the Andes is so extraordinarily rapid that it would be a singular fact if this river did not yield float gold. But the metal is not, and cannot be, present in paying quantities. The primary sources of gold are reefs, either in quartz or in metalliferous veins of galena and the various pyrites. There are none of these in the lower Andean range, which is composed almost exclusively of crystalline schist with a slight blend of basalt. I am a mining engineer, Mr. Sinclair, and I know what I am talking about. If you could put the entire southern Cordillera through a mill, you would not secure a pennyweight of gold to the ton."

Sinclair, of course, could not appreciate the remark-

able way in which Power's tongue loosened in dealing with the familiar jargon of his profession. For the time he was far more concerned with what he deemed a real marvel.

"A mining engineer, and your name is Power! Surely you can't be the Mr. Power who sailed from San Francisco to Valparaiso on the *Panama* seven years ago?" he cried.

"I am."

"But, excuse me, there must be some mistake. My daughter, Marguerite Sinclair, who was on board that vessel, spoke of a Mr. Power; but he was a young man. Of course, time does not stand still for any of us; but this Mr. Power would now be thirty-five, or thereabouts."

"That is my age."

"Thirty-five?"

"Yes."

Sinclair bent forward and peered into his visitor's eyes; it was difficult to detect any play of expression in the bearded face. "Are you really the man my daughter met on that steamer?" he asked, and there was a note of solemnity, almost of awe, in his voice. This anchorite seemed nearer sixty than thirty-five.

"Yes, I remember her perfectly—a charming girl. She had suffered some injury to her face during an attack by Indians on her father's ranch. Of course, you are her father?"

"Yes. But, tell me, Mr. Power—have you any notion of the extraordinary appearance you present? You force me to be blunt. You look like a man nearly twice your age."

"Lend me a scissors and a razor, and I shall remove a decade or two. Remember, I have lived as an Indian for seven years."

"I'll do more than that. I can give you some clothes and boots. God bless my soul! how surprised Meg will be! I recollect now she told me that her Mr. Power walked with a limp. But it's a far cry to Carmen. I——"

"Carmen, did you say?"

"Yes, why?"

Power had suddenly recalled the name of the stuffy little tramp on which he set forth from Valparaiso. What memories crowded in on him, what a record of suffering and achievement! Seven years! He knew now that his pilgrimage was ended. The great world had thrown wide its gates again. He could go back to his own country his own people. His sacrifice had been accepted. He was assoilized. He thought of his mother, of Nancy, and tears glistened in his eyes. He believed that some lesion had been lifted off his brain. He looked at the great facts of existence with a new and saner vision. He almost heard a vibrant and majestic voice saying to his spirit, "Go, and sin no more! Thy faith hath made thee whole!"

He rose, and was dimly aware that Sinclair was pressing him to stay. There was so much to discuss yet, so many vital matters to weigh and debate; but he managed to explain that he must depart now, and would return later.

"You don't understand that you are here on sufferance," he said. "I had to stretch my domination to the utmost—and I am a king among these Indians

—to stop them from attacking you. Your life, and the lives of every man in your party, are not worth a day's purchase if my influence is weakened. I cannot tell what evil counsel may be given to these wild folk in my absence. If I show myself, and assure them that I am safe, and that you mean to retreat almost at once, they will be satisfied, and bloodshed will be averted."

Sinclair glanced at him curiously, but did not seek further to prevent his immediate departure.

"You must act as you think best, Mr. Power," he said amicably; "but I certainly cannot promise to retreat merely because a few wretched Indians bar the path."

"I will convince you, never fear," came the prompt assurance.

"But I am not the only skeptic. There are others to consult. I have two partners in this enterprise, and one of them is a mining expert."

"Leave everything to me, and make no forward move till I come back. You can expect me in a couple of hours."

He could say no more. He was choking. It was a mere pretense that he must conciliate the Indians, who, he knew, were watching every move in the camp with the eyes of eagles. What he really feared, in that moment of revulsion and self-enlightenment, was that he might break down and cry like a child.

He strode away, aflame with the fire of longing for communion with his fellow-men. The tumult of emotion evoked by contact with the expedition startled and dismayed him; but he had not gone two hundred

yards up the valley before a sibilant hiss restored his scattered wits. He was passing an Indian outpost, and the faithful creatures were warning him of their presence. He signed that he was going to the village, and passed on. He had seen no one. Not a leaf moved among the trees; but the watchers were there, and would remain.

Much against the grain, though there was no help for it, he pacified the head men of the tribe by the statement that he must remain in the encampment that night; indeed, he did not purpose leaving the invaders until they had turned on their tracks. He dared not risk telling his "subjects" that he meant to abandon his empire. Their fierce passions were easily aroused, and a prompt massacre of Sinclair and his followers would be the certain result of a fanatical outbreak. Entering his hut, he picked up the "Horæ." As he did so, a wave of sentiment shook him, because he thought of the poor Spanish priest who had brought that precious volume from Cádiz or Barcelona, and, perchance, gazed at it with eyes glazing in death while he lurked, wounded and starving, in the cave where he had sought shelter from the pitiless savages. Now, if God willed, it might cross the Atlantic again.

He opened the book haphazard, and read:

"*In manus tuas, Domine, commendo spiritum meum!*"

Then he sank on his knees, and prayed; for, if ever man had placed soul and body in the keeping of the Almighty, he had.

That evening, master of himself, and ever recovering facility of speech, he reasoned with Sinclair and the

two Spaniards who had joined in the adventure. One, a Señor Felice Gomez, though posing as an authority on mines, had to admit that his knowledge was that of the company director and well-informed amateur. They were inclined to scoff at Power's predictions of disaster; but he wound up with an argument which proved irresistible.

"How much has this enterprise cost you?" he asked.

Sinclair answered readily.

"We have put up twenty thousand paper dollars * for expenses," he said. "My share is ten thousand, and my friends stand in five thousand each."

"Would you be satisfied if you got your money back, with a profit of one hundred per cent?"

"According to you, Mr. Power, and almost you convince me, we shall lose every penny."

"But, assuming the profit I have named, would such return on your capital send you home well content?"

"Speaking for myself, it would."

The Spaniards grinned amiably. As a conceit, the notion appealed to them. They were not poor men; but had embarked on the quest largely to sate their curiosity with regard to the unexplored reaches of the Chubut River.

"Good!" said Power. "I give your syndicate my personal undertaking to pay the sum of forty thousand dollars when we reach any place where there is a bank with a New York agent. I really mean what I say," he went on, seeing the blank incredulity writ-

* A paper dollar is worth about 40 per cent. of the gold dollar.

ten on three faces. "I am rich enough to table that offer without the slightest chance of failing to make good. Even though I die on the way to the coast, you will have my written undertaking, which will be honored by my bankers. If I survive the journey, a cablegram will convince you of my financial standing. Naturally, you will ask why I behave so generously. Well, there are three reasons: Were it not for your presence here, I might never have had a chance of returning to civilization; so I am disposed to pay liberally for your safe escort, which, to my thinking, has been sent by Providence in my special behalf. That, in itself, should suffice as an explanation. But the remaining motives are almost equally strong. I am sure you are rushing to certain death if you advance another mile up the valley; but, supposing, as you imagine, that your guns open the path, it will be across the dead bodies of a people whom I have learned to like, and among whom I have passed three not unhappy years. Very well! I purchase their lives. All I demand to seal the bargain is your promise to start downstream at daybreak, taking me with you; but leaving here all the pieces of iron, knives, nails, and such like articles you can spare from your equipment. The Indians will find and value them. They have no knowledge of metallic ores. There are hardly any to be found in this locality. It is a dead land, mere shale and rock and crumbling earth, devoid of the riches which alone would make it habitable. What do you say? If you agree to my terms, give me a pen and paper. I suppose I still can write, though I have not held a pen during seven years."

The man who could tame, and partly civilize, two Indian tribes was not like to fail when called on to subjugate men of his own or a kindred race. The triumvirate yielded. Next day, when the canoes had gone ahead, Power bestrode one of the dozen horses which accompanied the expedition. The rearguard set off at a canter, since a rolling down ran for eight miles to the first portage. As Power rode away with his new friends a long drawn-out, shrill wailing came from the forest. The Indians understood then. Their territory was left unspoiled; but they had lost their wonder-worker. Had they but known it, the "white fool" drew his hand across his eyes to clear away the tears.

. . . . . .

For three weeks the horsemen and canoes followed the windings of a river the waters of which were never turbid or blue, but emerald green, except during occasional sunsets, when they became a vivid crimson. Then the party reached Port Madryn, whence a small steamer took its chief members to Carmen, in the Rio Negro Territory. The Spaniards hailed from that place, and Sinclair, who had sold his Chubut ranch, had left his daughter with friends there. There was no cable available; but, by this time, Sinclair and his partners would as soon have distrusted an archbishop's word as Power's. Each day he reverted more and more to type; yet he lost nothing of the dignity and air of reposeful strength which his wanderings had conferred. So, when he gave written orders for the various sums due on his bond, they were accepted with the confidence

which would have been shown in the certified checks of a state bank.

The vessel had to steam several miles up the Rio Negro (the river is called "black"; but it is green as the Chubut) before touching the wharf at Carmen. News of their coming had preceded them, though no mention had been made of Power, and it was vastly amusing to Sinclair when his daughter, after embracing him affectionately, turned and held out her hand to the brown-skinned stranger.

"Welcome to Patagonia, Mr. Power!" she cried. "I was sure you would come to us some day; though I was told in Valparaiso, three years ago, that you were lost utterly in the depths of the Andes."

"So you have not forgotten me?" was all that Power could find to say; though he flushed with pleasure at this prompt recognition.

"Forgotten you? Didn't I tell you I should know you again in twenty years?"

"I am glad to have survived even a third of the time in your memory."

"Well, please don't test it so severely again. What have you been doing to yourself? You look like an Indian."

"Meg," broke in her father, "I hoped that four months' residence in a Spanish household would give you a more polite way of expr g yourself."

"Mr. Power takes that as a compliment, I am sure. When we parted he was running away from the flesh-pots of Egypt—or was it Bison? Evidently he has succeeded in his object. He is lean as a herring.

Where did you find him, Dad? Ruling a tribe of Araucanians, I'm certain."

"If I hadn't found him, you would never have seen me again, Girly. But we can't tell the horrible story here on the quay. Take me to a long cane chair, and mix me a whisky and soda. That wretched little tub of a steamer tried to stand on its head last night."

One thing was evident. Power had convinced his companions of the real danger they had escaped. He had said no word concerning the canyon, while it constituted the Indians' defense; but it was betraying no secret to make clear its perils during the journey to the coast.

Next day, after breakfast, Sinclair drew him aside, and handed him a sealed envelop.

"Meg objects strongly to the arrangement we entered into, in so far as it affects me," he explained. "She insists that I return your draft. I was turning the matter over in my own mind, and I was not altogether happy about it. Now I see that she is right."

"But both of you happen to be wrong," said Power.

"We're not. Why in blazes should *you* pay *me*? The boot is on the other leg. I owe you my life. Look here, Power, the thing can't be argued. If it pleases you to let my Spanish friends have their share of the money, I'll not say a word, one way or the other; but I'll see you cremated before I cash that draft!"

"Let me defray your out-of-pocket expenses, at any rate."

"Not a centavo! If you say anything more about it, I'll get an actuary to calculate my life value, and worry you till you accept a settlement in full."

"Women invariably take a distorted view of a matter like this," protested Power.

Sinclair laughed. "Oh, you have discovered that, have you?" he said. "Well, I can't afford to quarrel with Meg, and her heart is set on your tearing up the draft, Mr. Power."

The girl herself never mentioned the incident; but, when next they met, Power felt that a slight constraint of which he was sensible in her manner that morning had gone completely.

Sinclair's affairs in Patagonia were settled before he set out on that long trek into the wilds; but there still remained some odds and ends of business which detained him nearly a month in Carmen. During those placid days Power and Marguerite Sinclair were together constantly. They boated on the Rio Negro, fished in its swift current, rode long miles over the gray and treeless pampas. The girl was a woman now, and, were it not for that cruel disfigurement of one side of her face, a singularly attractive one. She was never dull, never at a loss for a new and original turn to the old topics. Her interests covered a surprisingly wide range. Whether singing Spanish songs to her own accompaniment on a guitar, or discoursing learnedly on the habits of the migratory wild-fowl with which Patagonia abounds, she never failed to acquit herself with vivacious charm. Indeed, the recluse of the Andes could not have been more favored by fortune in the choice of a companion. With sure touch, and a happy blend of raillery and sympathy, she led him back to the gracious intimacies of every-day existence. A keen and discriminating reader of contem-

porary literature, she set herself the congenial task of filling the immense gap of the years lost out of this remarkable man's life. On his part, so avid was he of the joys of regained citizenship of the world that he was blithely unaware of the place she filled in his thoughts until the day of parting.

He had traveled with father and daughter to Buenos Aires, whence he cabled to New York, and was placed in possession of ample funds. The Sinclairs were bound for England, and their steamer sailed almost immediately, and the vessel which would take him to New York was timed to start next day.

They lunched together in the Hôtel de l'Europe, Plaza Victoria, and Sinclair had left the younger people for a few minutes while interviewing a lawyer who had charge of certain financial matters in the Argentine. Some chance remark led Power to realize that Marguerite Sinclair's bright personality would soon be merged with yesterday's seven thousand years, and the knowledge darkened his new-born optimism as the black portent of a tornado blots out the blue of a summer sky.

It was hardly surprising that the discovery came thus tardily. The philosophical habit of mind induced by constant association with fatalistic Indians was not to be cast off like a disused garment. When each day resembled its predecessor, when the needs of the hour rendered care for the morrow an additional burden, he had trained himself to live, and almost to think, according to savage ethics, and it was with a positive shock that he awoke to the fact that before many hours had sped he would be alone. But, once it had entered

his soul, the leaven worked rapidly. They were talking in conventional strain about her father's plans for the future, which centered around a small sporting estate in Derbyshire, once owned by his family and now in the market, when Power rose suddenly.

"If you have finished luncheon," he said, "come with me into the gardens across the plaza. We'll leave word of our whereabouts with the hotel people, so that Mr. Sinclair will not think I have abducted you."

She paled slightly, and seemed to hesitate, but only for an instant. "Why not?" she said, dropping the white double veil she always wore in public.

Power rather looked for some biting retort when he spoke of abducting her, and her unexpected meekness was somewhat disconcerting. Each was tongue-tied, and they walked away together in silence. A good many eyes followed them as they left the hotel, for the girl's slender, lissome figure and noticeably elegant carriage would have attracted the attention of more censorious critics than a gathering of Spanish-Americans, while the wealth of brown hair which crowned her shapely head and column-like neck was adequately set off by a smart hat. Power, too, evoked some comment. People who saw him for the first time invariably asked who he was. A man who has twice established an empire, even among Indians, cannot possibly lack distinction, no matter how effectually the outfitting tailor may democratize him.

They entered the gardens, and Power led Marguerite to a seat under a tree whose spreading branches, broad-leafed and flower-laden, supplied grateful shade. If he could have peered beneath that heavy veil, he

would have seen that his companion was obviously ill at ease; but there was no trace of nervousness in her voice when she said, with a laugh:

"This, I suppose, is the local Garden of Eden."

"Why?" he inquired.

"Because we are reclining under a Paradise tree."

"I don't see any serpents, and I cannot bring myself to regard you as either a cherub or a seraph."

"How unkind of you! Here have I been behaving angelically all day, just because you will soon see the last of me, and that is my reward."

"I believe the sex of angels is a matter of fierce dispute in certain circles. I wouldn't dare form an opinion, and, just now at any rate, I am vexed by a different problem. If this tree is really the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, its influence will be helpful, because we should be moved to candor. I brought you here to ask you some questions of vital importance to myself. Are you promised to any man in marriage?"

"No. Is it likely?"

Not often did the bitter consciousness of her marred beauty rise thus bluntly to her lips; but she blurted it out now involuntarily. In this supreme moment it came as a protest against the edict of the gods. Even while she trembled in the belief that a happiness she had not dared to think of sanely was about to be vouchsafed to her, she could not restrain her terror lest the disillusionment of her scarred face might cost her the love of the one man on earth she wanted to marry. It was the heartfelt cry of a woman denied her birthright. "Male and female created he them." The

sorry trick of fate which had tarnished the fair tabernacle that enshrined so many gifts had never before exhibited its true malice. In a word, Marguerite Sinclair was a woman, and the great crisis of her life had found her unprepared and nearly hysterical.

Power, of course, was splendidly deaf to her satire and its cause.

"I should say it was the most likely thing imaginable," he replied. "I wish——" He broke off abruptly. "You and I should have no reservations," he went on, after a pause, "and it would not be quite honest if I voiced the banal notion I had in mind. Yet I must tell you something of my history. You know, I suppose, that I am going to ask you to marry me; but, before you answer, you must hear the plea, the defense, of a man who committed a crime and had to pay the penalty."

"You committed no crime, Derry," and the girl's utterance was so low and sweet that it swept through his inmost being like a chord of exquisite music. Some seconds elapsed before he understood that she had used a name which could not have come to her knowledge without a far more intimate acquaintance with his past life than he believed possible.

"Derry!" he repeated blankly. "How have you found out that those I once held dear called me 'Derry'?"

She forced herself to speak calmly; though her hands were clenched in sheer physical effort to quell the riot in heart and brain.

"I am not [illegible]ther women," she said; "so I say shamelessly that I loved you practically from the hour

we first met. Do you remember? You looked at me, and then turned your eyes away resolutely, lest you should hurt my feelings by seeming to gaze at my scarred features. I knew that night that you were a man scourged by the wrath of Heaven, and my sympathies went out to you; for, in my own small way, I realized what you felt. But your affliction was of the spirit, and mine of the flesh, and I could afford to laugh at my malaise except—except on an occasion like this, when a man says he wants to marry me, but says nothing of love. No, please! Hear me out. I am really answering your question, in a woman's way, perhaps, but candidly, with a frankness that should blight romance. When we parted at Valparaiso, my thoughts dwelt with you. You are the one man I have ever cared for, in that way. During these weary years I have hugged the delusion that some day you would tell me that you loved me. Well, I admit that love was implied when you spoke of marriage; but you have often been annoyed or amused by my distorted method of looking at things, and you should not resent it now when it happens to describe the situation exactly—because you yourself almost began by saying that you wished we had met before another woman came into your life. Yes, I know—at any rate, I can guess—why you were buried alive for seven years. My action may sound contemptible; but a woman in love does not stop to weigh niceties of behavior. When I could get no news of you by other means, I wrote to a school friend at Denver. Among the people she met when making inquiries were a Dr. Stearn and a Mr. Benson. They did not tell her much; but femi-

nine gossip is far-reaching, and sometimes it probes deeply. I know you loved Nancy Willard. I know how you were separated from her. I know you met her again in Newport. I know you blamed yourself for the death of your mother. I know that your friends thought you were mad, but pitied you, because yours was a grievous plight. You see now how I peeped and pried into your life. Oh! it was mean and despicable of me. It is not for *you* to plead and make excuse. That is *my* wretched task. Is it any sort of vindication to tell you that my heart ached because of that far-away look ever in your eyes while we voyaged south? You have not forgotten that I said you resembled a man walking in his sleep? Well, I wanted to find out what sort of folly or suffering had induced that trance. My poor little heart sang with joy when you stepped ashore at Carmen, and I saw that your obsession had gone, that you had come to life again, that no pale specters stood between us. Now you have heard my confession, it is for *you* to take time—before—you commit yourself—to vows—which you may regret."

It was as much as she could do to utter those concluding words. The tears she might not repress were stealing silently down her cheeks, and small, dark patches showed where the tightly drawn veil touched the corners of her mouth. The hotel porch was visible between two clumps of tropical shrubbery, and, when a mule-drawn street-car moved out of the way, Power saw Sinclair's tall, thin figure standing in the doorway. Evidently, his glance was searching the gardens for the missing pair, and the departure of the tram rendered them visible. He raised a hand, and opened

and closed it twice. Power waved comprehension, and Sinclair vanished. Perhaps he had a shrewd notion of the subject of their talk, and was minded not to disturb them till the last moment.

"I take it your father means that we still have ten minutes at our disposal," said Power.

The girl nodded. If she spoke then, she would have screamed.

"You have relieved me of a highly disagreeable task," he went on composedly. "Of course, I accept none of the unkind and unjust strictures you passed on yourself. This has been a strange wooing; but it is the best apology for the real thing I can contrive in the conditions. Some day, soon, I shall take you in my arms and tell you that I love you. When that day dawns, I shall be hindered by no ghosts; none other, that is, than a lurking fear lest such a wreck of a man may not be deemed worthy of the pure, sweet love of a woman like you. Good God! Can it be possible that so great a happiness is entering into my broken life?"

Then the delirium of joy vanquished the girl's fears, and she contrived to say haltingly:

"Derry, do you really care for me? Do you think that such a poor scarecrow as I can make you forget all that you have endured?"

He laughed, and the blithe ring of his mirth was so eloquent of his real feelings that the blood raced in her veins like quicksilver.

"We must begin by refusing to call each other hard names," he cried. "In truth, I regard myself as a tolerably compact wreck, while 'scarecrow,' as applied

to you, would make a cat laugh. Suppose we stick to 'Derry' and 'Meg' until the wonder passes, and we venture among those endearing terms in which our language is so rich. But, if you must have my opinion about your face—if you won't be happy till you get it—I want to tell you now that before I kiss your lips I shall kiss that dear, scarred cheek, because I know well that, by God's providence, when the Indians thrust you into the flames of your ranch, a mark was set on you that reserved you for me. Were it not for that, you could never have waited for me during the long years since we traveled together on the *Panama*. Why, Meg, there is no woman to compare with you in all this great city! But, look here! Confound my impudence! Man-like, I blandly ignore my own defects. How about my limp?"

"Derry, in my eyes, there is no man in all the world to compare with you."

"Then we are profoundly satisfied with one another, and I really don't see what we have to bother about otherwise. I am going now to tell your father that we have arranged to be married as soon as I arrive in England, which will be not more than two months from this day. I think he likes me, and will endure me as a son-in-law. If I obeyed my own impulses, I should not leave you again. I suppose that common sense urges me to visit New York and Colorado, just to look into my business affairs. In fact, in view of our marriage, I simply must go there. But I shall hurry, never fear. Come along, Meg. I'm wide awake now. You have exorcised the evil spirit that possessed me; but I shall be in a new fever till

next we meet, and there is no more parting in this life."

Thus was love reborn in Power's heart. The pity of it was that he did not yield to the tiny god's ardent whispers, and refuse to relinquish his chosen bride, even for a brief space. But, as he said, common sense demanded his presence in America, and common sense has shattered many dreams.

CHAPTER XVI

POWER DRIVEN INTO WILDERNESS

Power arrived at New York in mid-winter. He found that crowded hive humming, as usual, with life and its activities, but in a new and perplexing way. The Waldorf Hotel had become the Waldorf-Astoria, and, while doubling its name, had increased fourfold in size. Its main corridor had the bustle and crush of a busy street; but every face had an aspect of aloofness, almost of hostility. The old, intimate life of America had vanished. None paid heed to the newcomer. The spick-and-span occupants of the reception bureau evidently regarded him as Room Number So-and-so. Confused and mystified by the well-dressed throng of the hotel's patrons, he failed to notice, at first, that it was composed of individuals, or groups, as unknown to one another as he was to the mass; that, in very truth, it was

". . . no other than a moving row
Of Magic Shadow-shapes that come and go."

He reached the hotel early in the evening, and was fortunate in being able to secure a suite of rooms. Soon wearying of the traffic in that world's fair which caustic New York has nicknamed "Rubberneck Alley," he bought a newspaper, and retired to his apart-

ments. But the day's record held no interest for him. He knew little of the men and women who figured therein; even less of the events which called for big type and immense headlines.

But his eye was caught by an announcement of a performance that night of Gounod's "Faust" at the Metropolitan Opera House. He resolved to go there, never dreaming that the odds were hundreds to one against the chance of obtaining a seat; for New York had just entered the lists against the other capitals of the world, and was determined to capture the leading place in the grand-opera tourney.

He telephoned the office, "Kindly get me a stall for the Metropolitan this evening."

And, behold! a blasé clerk was actually stirred out of boredom by the surprising statement received from the box-office that a stall had just been returned, and he could have it now if he closed at once. So Power never knew what a trick Fortune had played him, since there can be little doubt that the impression made by the marvelous music and extraordinarily human appeal of "Faust" insensibly prepared him for the tragic events of the coming day. Imagine a man of musical bent, who had dwelt seven years among veritable savages, renewing his acquaintance with the muses by hearing the most poignant of stage love-stories told in Gounod's impassioned strains and interpreted by famous singers and a superb orchestra!

The exquisite tenderness of the doomed lover's first address to Marguerite thrilled his inmost being.

"Ne permettrez-vous pas, ma belle demoiselle,
Qu'en vous offre le bras, pour faire le chemin?"

He was struck by the coincidence that the woman to whom he was pledged should be named Marguerite! *Faire le chemin!* Yes, they would soon be taking the long road of life together. What assured happiness seemed to breathe from each perfect note; yet what horror and despair would be the outcome of the man's ardor and the maid's shy diffidence! When Marguerite told Faust that she was *ni demoiselle, ni belle,* Power could hardly fail to recollect that his own Marguerite, not without cruel cause, was ever tortured by the fear that her disfigurement might some day turn him from her with loathing. Even the slaying of Valentine as the direct outcome of his sister's frailty seemed, to the overwrought imagination of one member of the audience, to bear an uncanny analogy to his mother's death. There remained one other point of contact between the story of the opera and Power's own life; but, fortunately for him, or his surcharged emotions might not have withstood the strain, he could not recognize as yet that last and most terrible similarity.

As it was, his rapt interest in the opera attracted the attention of his neighbors in the stalls. As a girl whispered to her attendant cavalier:

"That man near us—the man with the piercing eyes and worn face—seems to regard 'Faust' as history rather than allegory."

"Perhaps he sees the allegory," was the answer, and the girl shrugged her pretty shoulders. She was young, and dwelt in a sheltered garden. To her, "Faust" was only an opera. It had nothing to do with the realities of life; which, if she were asked for a defini-

tion, consisted mainly of so ordering one's time as to miss no important social function.

Next morning, though aware of a nervous system still in a curious state of exaltation and strain after his overnight experiences, Power yielded quickly to the stimulating effect of the keen, cold air and bright sunshine of a typical winter's day on the North Atlantic seaboard. After breakfast he walked to his bank, and was received as one risen from the dead. Financial institutions, even the soundest and most conservative, have a special flair for clients who allow vast sums of money to accumulate, year by year, at rates of interest which suit the bank's own purposes.

When Power had been welcomed heartily by the manager—his friend of former days, now promoted—the latter said cheerfully:

"Well, since you have actually returned from Mars, or whatever planet you may have been visiting, I suppose you want to look into your account?"

"It seems a reasonable thing to do, especially as I am thinking of marrying," agreed Power.

The official gave some instruction to the general office, and a passbook was produced. There were, of course, hardly any entries on the debit side, and payments from mine and ranch had been made half-yearly; so one small book contained the whole of the seven years' statement. Power, unaccustomed as yet to the methods of financial bookkeeping, turned to the latest column, and saw a row of figures. He looked perplexed, whereat the manager smiled.

"Well," came the question, "I fancy you find yourself well able to maintain a wife?"

Power's eyes seemed to be fascinated by the item which had first attracted them.

"Y-yes," he said hesitatingly; "but I had a notion that I was very much better off."

Then it was the manager's turn to be puzzled. He rose, came round the table at which the two were seated, and adjusted his eyeglasses.

"Better off!" he exclaimed. "Why, you are a very rich man, Mr. Power. Don't you see——" He broke into a loud laugh as he discovered the entry which this queer-mannered client was gazing at. "Man alive," he cried, "that is the last half-year's interest on your capital! The current rate is rather low, two and one-half per cent. Here," and he pointed to the top of the page, "is a summary of your deposit—four million dollars, all in hard cash. If you mean to begin investing, I must ask you to go slow. Even in your own interests, that is advisable. Heavy purchases of stock tend to bull the market, and it is a little inclined to go that way at the moment. I'll give you a list of gilt-edged securities which will, of course, nearly double your annual revenue from invested capital alone. You had better show it to some other adviser, and, when you have selected your stocks, let me begin operating. I can carry the whole thing through in a couple of months without letting Wall Street know that a big buyer is in the market."

Power was rather stunned by the amount of his wealth, and an odd thought darted through his brain that if, in the world of today, no tempter could bribe another Doctor Faustus with the offer of renewed youth, the fiend might pour gold into his chosen vic-

tim's pockets. Almost could he feel the mocking phantom at his shoulder; though, indeed, there was none other in the room than the courteous banker.

"Great Scott!" the latter was saying. "What a bonanza that mine of yours is! And Bison is growing quite a town. I paid it a flying visit last summer. Have you been there recently? I imagine not, since your cablegram came from Buenos Aires."

Bison was a word to evoke shadows; but it sufficed to drive one away just then.

"Ah, Bison!" said Power, standing up. "I must go west at once. I have not even made known to MacGonigal my presence in America. He is well, I hope?"

"Fatter than ever. There is some talk of his running for governor."

"And Jake, the man in charge of the ranch? Did you hear of him when you were in Colorado?"

"Yes, indeed. He is married."

"Married! Jake!"

"More than that, his wife, a pretty little woman, told me she had to threaten a divorce in order to stop him from mounting the little Jakes on what he calls 'plugs' before the kiddies were well out of the perambulator."

A clerk announced through a speaking-tube that someone wanted the banker. The conventional, "Ask him to wait one minute," warned Power that this was no hour for gossip.

"I can have some money now?" he inquired.

"As much as you like."

"May I ask—I am a child in these matters—if good

diamonds are obtainable in New York, and what I ought to pay for a ring—an engagement ring?'

"Our diamonds are not cheap; but they are supposed to be the pick of the market. I think you ought to get a perfect ring for a thousand dollars. By the way, there is quite an accumulation of letters here. Leave your address, and they will be packed and sent to your rooms."

Power wrote a check at the counter, and was given a bundle of notes. He went to a well-known jewelry establishment recommended by the bank manager, and asked to be shown some engagement rings.

"What size, sir?" inquired an attendant.

"Oh, not anything remarkable, but of the best quality."

"I mean, sir, what size is the lady's finger?"

Power laughed. He realized that he must come down out of the clouds, and pay heed occasionally to the minor phases of life.

"I don't know. She has small hands, and, long, tapering fingers," he said, smiling at his own fatuity; for the description might have been a line taken bodily out of nineteen novels among every twenty.

"It really doesn't matter, sir," said the shopman, eager to please a new customer. "If you choose a suitable ring, the lady can send or bring it here, and it will be adjusted to the right size without any delay or extra charge."

"But she is in England."

"Exactly the same conditions apply in our London branch."

So Power bought a very beautiful ring, which hap-

pened to contain seven graduated stones in a single row. The number pleased him, and he was sure Meg would note its significance. He secured the gage thus early so that he might write and tell her about it; while its mere possession and safeguarding would supply an extra stimulus for a speedy crossing of the Atlantic.

Then he strolled up Fifth Avenue, and did not flinch from memories of the last time he had passed through that remarkable thoroughfare. He would be callous, indeed, if his thoughts did not dwell on Nancy, and go back to the sweet lawlessness of their brief companionship. Where was she now? he wondered. A fine lady, no doubt, ruffling it with matronly self-possession among the high-born friends she had won in Paris and London. And that mean-spirited wretch, her father? Dead, in all probability, or eating his heart out in semi-insanity; for Power was beginning to see, with surer, wider vision, that Willard must have known he was a murderer, since no other hand but his had sent a dear and honored woman to her grave.

Then his mind reverted to Marguerite Sinclair, and he was comforted by his knowledge of her frank, joyous, make-the-best-of-everything temperament. He had not deluded himself into the belief that he was marrying her in the flood-tide of passion which had overwhelmed Nancy and himself. Pretense was always hateful to him, and it would be rank hypocrisy to assume that the madness of that first love could ever again surge through heart and brain. Marguerite's own action in accepting him after she had looked into the pages of his earlier life gave ample assurance that she would be content with his faith and devotion. She

was no lovesick maid, but a woman of strong, clear perceptions. He was troubled with no doubt as to the future nor qualm as to the past, and he thanked Providence humbly for having allotted him such a true and honest helpmate for his remaining years.

On returning to the hotel, he found a bulky package in his room. It contained heaps of letters and other documents which had been sent to the bank or forwarded from Bison, and, of course, they were mostly seven years old, or thereabouts. Two, bearing recent postmarks, caught his eye, and he read them first.

One was from Dacre. "You see," it ran, "I remain on the map. If this reaches you, cable me. My house is yours for as long as you care to stay."

The other brought a smile to his lips. It was in Spanish, and signed "Bartolomeo Malaspina":

"Honored Señor [wrote the captain of the *Carmen*].—"You asked me to write after seven years. Well, praised be my patron saint, I am still alive, and I hope you are. I have often spoken to my wife of the wretchedness of soul you caused me by disappearing among those accursed Indians; but I must admit, nevertheless, that your short voyage in my ship brought me luck, for I fell in with a liner with a broken shaft caused by colliding with a derelict, and she was drifting into the reefs off Hanover Island when I got a tow-rope on board. It was a fine job to haul her as far as Punta Arenas; but, thanks to the Eleven Thousand Virgins, I managed it, and the salvage made me a rich man. The *Carmen*, too, ran ashore at Iquique on the homeward voyage, and she was well insured. Write, I pray you, if you have escaped from the cannibals. If not, a

year from this date, I shall pay for two masses for the repose of your soul."

So, then, he was remembered by a few friends. The knowledge consoled him for the heedless rush and flurry of New York.

An impulse seized him to break the seals of an envelop marked, "To be burnt, unopened, by my executors," and take therefrom two letters which he knew it contained. The action was nothing more nor less than a trial of his new-born resolve; since the letters were Nancy's to himself and Willard's to his mother. He read them calmly and dispassionately. Willard's malicious threat he dismissed quickly. It had served its vile purpose, and its victims had paid the price demanded, the mother by death, the son by suffering. But Nancy's few disconnected sentences gripped his imagination with a new force. Had he misjudged her? he wondered. What argument had Willard used that she yielded so promptly and completely? The broken, pitiful words brought a mist before his eyes. Poor girl! Perhaps, in her woman's way, she had endured miseries from which life among the Indians had rescued him. Then he recalled the farewell message she had given to Dacre, and the momentary belief that he might have acted precipitately died away. Should he ever meet her in the years to come? He hoped not, with all his heart. He must so contrive Meg's life and his own that they would pass their days far from the haunts of society. The worship of the golden calf permits its votaries no escape. Thank Heaven, and he and his wife would never practise the cult!

Glancing casually through the rest of the heap, his attention was drawn to a couple of cablegrams. He opened one, and found that it was dated in the late autumn of that memorable year. It read:

"Leave everything, and forget all that has passed. Come at once.

"N."

One night, sleeping in the depths of a Patagonian forest, he had been aroused by the snarl of some wild animal close at hand. He had never known what beast it was that rustled away among the undergrowth; but he felt the same sense of impending evil now. Thinking the other message might be more explanatory, he tore at the envelop with nervous fingers; but the contents were an exact replica of its predecessor. Then he saw that one had been sent to Bison and the other to New York on the same day, the place of origin of each being London.

He could not doubt that "N" was "Nancy," and he asked himself, with quick foreboding, what strong motive had inspired this urgent command. He was to forget all that had passed! What strangely variable creatures woman were, to be sure! Could she, or any woman, honestly imagine that such a request might be obeyed? Forget that struggle between love and duty; forget the delirium of that fortnight in the Adirondacks; forget the numb agony of the days following her flight? As soon might a man forget his own name!

Nerving himself to the task, he searched for some

written word which should make clear the baffling enigma. Soon he came across two letters in Nancy's handwriting, and bearing the London postmark. The dates were three months apart, and the earlier one corresponded with that on the cablegrams; so he opened it first, and read:

"My own dear Derry.—A few hours ago I cabled you, both to Bison and New York, that you are to come to me without delay, and I hope, I even pray on my knees, that you are already in the train or steamer. Still, I am in such a fever of dread lest any untoward event may have kept my message from you, or prevented you from starting instantly, that I write also. If, which Heaven forbid, any shred of doubt or misgiving has gripped you, and you have decided to await a more explicit reason for my action in bidding you come, I am writing by to-day's mail to tell you that circumstances beyond my control, or yours, render it imperative that I should leave Hugh Marten now and forever. Derry, don't ask me to explain myself more fully. There are things which a woman may whisper, but which she cannot write. Yet it is only just that I should, at least, make plain the dreadful conditions under which I left you five months since. My father meant to kill you before my eyes. No consideration would have stopped him. He was resolved to shoot you without warning if I refused to return to Marten's house, and I yielded; for I could not bear the thought of seeing you stretched lifeless in front of the dear little hut in which we had been so happy. I may have been weak, but I loved you too much to let you give your life in exchange for my love, and he convinced me that he was in deadly earnest. So I went away with him, and tried to make myself despicable in your eyes as the surest way of searing the bitter wound my

action would cause. Remember, he left me no alternative. The break had to be final, or he would seek you out and slay you without mercy, and I knew only too well that he not only meant what he said, but that our laws would support and public opinion acclaim his action. Well, I traveled with him to England, and have been so ill ever since—though not physically such a wreck as I have pretended to be—that Marten believes I am suffering from the effects of the heat wave, and has compelled me to endure the treatment and scrutiny of many doctors. And today, one of them—— But now I must be dumb, except to tell you that, whether or not it means death to both of us, you *must* come and take me away to some secret place where none can find us. Don't think that this letter is written in a moment of impulse. It is not the product of a woman's hysteria. It is a cry from my very heart. And, in the midst of my desolation, I am glad—oh, so glad! I am aflame with a delight that is almost superhuman; for I know that you will understand, and that nothing on earth can ever part us again. My tears are falling on this page, but my higher and truer self is singing a canticle of praise and wonderful joy. Hurry, Derry, hurry!

"I am, and have ever been,

"Your true and devoted

"NANCY."

Power's brain was on fire as he read; but his heart seemed to be in the clutch of an icy hand. For some minutes—he never subsequently knew how long the trance lasted—he was transported bodily to the shores of a sunlit lake, and he lived again through the frenzy of those first hours after Nancy's disappearance. When his senses came back, and his blazing eyes could discern the written word, he read and reread those

parts of the letter which breathed her secret. Then, with the listless despair of a man who realizes that the new sanctuary of hope and self-confidence which he had constructed with so much blind faith, to which he had given so many laborious years, was tumbling in ruins at his feet, he opened the second letter, which was somewhat bulky, and crackled under his touch. From the middle of the folded sheet he took a withered spray of white heather. Had it been a poisonous snake he could not have started more violently. There was no doubting either its origin or significance. He held in his shaking hands the very spray Nancy carried at her wedding, and she had sent it as a token that all was at an end between them. He was minded then and there to commit the whole pile of correspondence to destroying flames; but he was well aware that such a coward's trick would prove of no avail. Strive as he might, he could never expel from his breast the blighting knowledge lodged there now and forever. Those shrunken and faded strands of heather were typical of his own life. Not all the alchemies of wizardry or miracles of science could restore their bright hues. They were dead, and sinking slowly into dust. No shower from Heaven could freshen them, no kindly care quicken them into vitality. They were dead, and he was dead, a mere dried-up husk of a man, a banned creature, to whom hope and faith and the bright vision of a new career were ruthlessly forbidden.

At last, thinking he might as well learn the scorching truth in its entirety, he turned to the letter.

It was undated; but the postmark was eloquent, and it began with strange abruptness:

"So, then, Derry, you have cast me off, left me to die; for I shall die within a month, or less. Well, be it so. I am content. If such is the woman's lot, of what avail to cry aloud to Heaven that it is unjust? But, if ever you come to realize what tortures I have endured while waiting in vain for the answer that never arrived, surely you will pity me. I, once so full of the joy of life, am humbled to the dust. Your departure from Bison—for my constant friend MacGonigal has told me of your going—robbed me of my last frail refuge. Some day, perhaps, you will read these farewell words of the woman who loved you, who still loves you, who will love you to the end, whose last prayer will be for you and not for herself. Oh, Derry, it will be hard to pass into the everlasting night, knowing that you and I shall never meet again on this side of the grave, but harder still to deliver into the keeping of one whom I loathe the living memory of my brief happiness. It may not be so. My child and I may go out into the darkness together; but I dare not petition the Most High for that crowning mercy. Have I really done wrong? I cannot decide, but grope blindly for guidance. If I am judged, it will be by One who looks into the heart, and will treat an erring woman with divine compassion as well as justice. But you, if ever you see what I am setting down here, and I am convinced that you will, even though I be long dead—what of you? My heart aches for you. Can I give you any message of healing and solace? Yes, one. If my child lives—ah, it is bitter to think that the mother's eyes will be glazing in death when they see her babe!—I charge you with a sacred responsibility. What do I mean? I cannot tell you. I am fey today. I peer into a dim future. I only know that I shall not survive my little one's birth, and that some day, somehow, you will understand that which is hidden from my ken in laying

this duty upon you. And that way will come consolation. Do you remember how I used to hate that word 'duty'? Yet it is stronger than I. It compels me, even now.

"Farewell, Derry. I kiss you, in a waking dream. No matter what the world has in store for you—though some other fair woman may quicken into life because of you—though men may honor your name and exalt you to the high places—you will never forget the girl you once held dear. As a souvenir, I send you all that is left of the bunch of white heather which formed my wedding bouquet. Did you see it that day when you hid on the ledge, and watched the triumphal start of a journey which has led me into such strange places and is now to end so soon? We never spoke of it when we passed the long, sunny hours by the lake—dear Heaven! our lake! Would that its bright waters had closed over my head then; for I was so happy, and so much in love with you and the world! But I knew what happened on that June day in the Gulch, for I could read your soul mirrored in your eyes; so now I give you one final memento, and hug the belief that you will press it to your lips. My poor secret dies with me, perhaps. I don't imagine that the man whom I used to revere as a father will satisfy an unfathomable spite by denying my child the tending and luxury it will receive in Hugh Marten's care. I could write reams of a woman's sad longings, of explanations that would lead nowhere; but I dare not trust even you, else you would deem me mad. And I am not mad, only woebegone and fearful, for the night cometh, and I shudder at its silence and mystery. So, once more, and for the last time, farewell, my dear. I take you in my arms. I cling to you, even in death."

The unhappy man wilted under that piteous leave-taking. He felt that he had descended into a tomb,

and was listening to a voice speaking in dread tones. The thick curtains of despair closed over his soul, and he seemed to be falling into an abyss. He heard himself uttering a broken wail of protest; for it was borne in on him that Nancy's heart-rending message had riveted close against the fetters he thought to have left forever amid the dun recesses of the Andes. What remained in life for him? What could there be of happiness and content, with the dire conviction lodged immovably in heart and brain that Nancy, like his mother, had died because of his wrong-doing? He was caught in some furious and fatal maelstrom which, like that fabled whirlpool of the North Sea, was sweeping him, in ever-narrowing circles, to irresistible doom. The marvel is that his mind did not give way; but a merciful release was not to be vouchsafed in that manner, for the fantastic laughter of lunacy would have been kinder than the blackness of darkness which now enwrapped his being. In that hour of abasement his spirit capitulated. Nothing mattered. He was crushed and paralyzed. He could not pray, because it did not seem as though there was One who gave heed. The bright world had become a place of skulls, a charnel house, a prison whose iron walls were closing in on him eternally.

It was a strange thing that he did not, even as a passing obsession, think of terminating the dreary pilgrimage of life then and there. At Bison, during the first stupor of grief after his mother's death and Nancy's desertion, he had pondered, many a time, the awful problem which ever presents itself to men of strong will and resolute purpose. When life appears

to be no longer worth living the question arises—why not end it? But seven years of lonely musing had given depth and solidity to his nature. Above all, he had been taught to endure. He had come now to a worse pass than any that pierced the Andes; for an unending desert lay in front, while he was leaving a fair territory in which lay domestic joys and a love for which his soul hungered. In the moment when union with Marguerite Sinclair was forbidden so sternly he gaged with woeful accuracy the extent of his longing for her companionship. He understood, with a certainty of judgment that brooked no counter argument, that he could never marry. He dared not. If that which Nancy had said was true, he would surely kill himself in a paroxysm of loathing and self-accusation when any other woman's kiss was still hot on his lips.

There remained a task not to be shirked—he must ascertain, beyond doubt, that Nancy was really dead. Gathering the four letters in whose yellowing sheets was summarized the whole story of his wasted life, he placed them in a pocketbook. In doing so, he happened to touch the case containing the ring he had bought for Meg. Oddly enough, that simple incident cost him the sharpest pang; but he conquered his emotions, much as a man might do who was facing unavoidable death, and even forced his trembling fingers to put the envelop which held Nancy's white heather side by side with Marguerite's diamonds. Then he went out.

An oldtime acquaintance in Denver with the ways of journalism led him to the nearest newspaper office.

There he asked to be taken to the news editor's room, and a busy man looked at him curiously when he explained that he wanted to know whether or not Mrs. Marten, wife of Hugh Marten, was living, and, if dead, the date of her demise.

There was something in Power's manner that puzzled the journalist, some hint of tragedy and immeasurable loss, but he was courteously explicit.

"You mean Hugh Marten, the financier, formerly of Colorado?" he inquired.

"Yes, that is the man."

The other took a volume from a shelf of biographies, by which is meant the newspaper variety—typed accounts of notable people still living, together with newspaper cuttings referring to recent events in their careers. Soon he had a pencil on an entry.

"Yes," he said. "Mrs. Marten has been dead nearly seven years."

"And her child? Is the child living?"

"Yes. Poor lady! She died in giving it birth. I remember now. It was a very sad business. Mrs. Marten was a remarkably beautiful woman. Her husband was inconsolable. He has not married again; but is devoted to his little daughter, who, by the way, was named after her mother—Nancy Willard Marten. Ah, of course, that middle name reminds me of something else. Mrs. Marten's father, Francis Willard, was accidentally shot last year."

"Shot?"

"Yes. He was summering in the Adirondacks, and was out after duck; but, by some mischance, caught

a trigger when crawling through a clump of rushes, and blew the top of his head off."

"He was near a lake, the...?"

"Yes. It wasn't Forked Lake, but a sheet of water in the hills not far distant. I can find out the exact locality if you wish it."

"No, thank you. I am very much obliged to you."

"No trouble at all. Sorry I hadn't better news, if these people are friends of yours."

So Willard was dead, and by his own hand, and the scene of his last reckoning was the lake which witnessed the ignoble revenge he had wreaked on Power by sacrificing Nancy! The broken man bowed his head humbly. He had been scourged with whips; but his sworn enemy had been chastised with scorpions.

CHAPTER XVII

SHOWING HOW POWER MET A GUIDE

If a man be harassed too greatly by outrageous fortune, there comes a time when he will defy the oppressing gods, and set their edicts at naught. Power's temperament fitted him for sacrifice carried far beyond the common limits of human endurance; but his gorge rose against this latest tyranny; the recoil from bright hope to darkest despair brought him perilously near the gulf. Seated in his room, and reviewing his wrecked life, he was minded then and there to fling himself into the worst dissipation New York could offer. What had he gained by his self-imposed penance, his exile, and his unquestioning service? No monk of La Trappe had disciplined body and soul more rigorously than he during seven weary years; yet, seemingly, his atonement was not accepted, and he was faced now by a decree that entailed unending banishment. Was Providence, then, less merciful than man? The felon, convicted of an offense against his country's laws, was better treated than he. The poor wretch released from prison was met at the gates of the penitentiary by philanthropic offer of reinstatement among his fellows; but for the man who had yielded once to the lure of a woman's love there was, apparently, no forgiveness. Why

should he accept any such inexorable ban? He was young, as men regard youth in these days. He was rich. The wine of life ran red in his veins. Why should he fold his arms and bend his head, and say with the meek Jesuit whose moldering bones had harbored that beautiful volume lying there in its leather covering, "*Fiat voluntas Tua!*"

That hour of revolt was the bitterest in Power's existence. Like Jacob, he wrestled with a too potent adversary, and, refusing to yield, asked for a curse rather than a blessing; for he thought he was striving against a fiend. Fortunately, he underestimated his own strength. Some men, he knew, would have tossed every record of the past into the fire, and married the woman of their choice without other than a momentary qualm of conscience. That course, to him, was a sheer impossibility. While the dead Nancy and her living child stood in the gates of Eden, and option lay only between wedding Marguerite Sinclair and blowing out his brains, he would die unhesitatingly. But, if he continued to live, what was the outlook? Wine, women—debauchery, lewdness? His soul sickened at the notion. He laughed, with bitter humor, while picturing himself a roué, a "sport," an opulent supporter of musical comedy—especially with regard to its frailer exponents—a lounger in "fashionable" resorts. No; that was not the way out of the maze, if ever a way might be found.

It was a sign of returning sanity that he should fill his pipe. As the German proverb has it, "God first made man, and then He made woman; then, feeling sorry for man, He made tobacco." Power continued

to sit there smoking, lost in troubled but more humbled thought, until a chambermaid entered the room. He had kept no count of time, and had evidently passed many hours in somber musing; for the apartment was in semidarkness, and the girl started when she caught sight of the solitary figure sunk in the depths of an armchair.

"My land!" she cried, "but you made me jump!" Then, aware that this was not precisely the manner of address expected by patrons of the Waldorf-Astoria, she added hurriedly, "I beg your pardon, sir. I didn't know you were in. Shall I switch on the light?"

"Can you?" he said.

"Why, of course, I can. There you are!"

The room was suddenly illuminated. Power rose and stretched his limbs—he felt as if he had marched many miles carrying a heavy load.

"Like others of your sex, you work miracles, then," he said.

One glance at his face, and the housemaid regained confidence. "Yes, if it is a miracle to touch a switch," she answered pertly.

"Nothing more wonderful was done when the world was created. 'Let there be light, and there was light.' You have read the first chapter of Genesis, I am sure?"

"Yes, and the second."

"Good! Stop there, if you would rest thoroughly content. The serpent lifts his head in the third. Will you kindly send the valet?"

The girl confided to her fellow-servants in the service-room that the gentleman in Number So-and-so was very nice, but slightly cracked. He seemed to

have been upset by a lot of old letters—and it was an odd thing that among all the rich people who lived in the hotel none seemed to be really happy. Now, if she, deponent, only possessed a fraction of their wealth, she would enjoy life to the limit.

Power did not change his attire that evening. He dined quietly in the restaurant, and strolled out into Broadway afterward. The loneliness of a great city, at first so repellent, was grateful to him now. The crowded streets were more democratic than the palatial saloons of the hotel, the air more breathable. But the flood of light in the Great White Way—though blazing then with a subdued magnificence as compared with its bewildering luster nowadays—was garish and harsh, and he turned into the sheltering gloom of a quiet side-street. He was passing a row of red-stone houses—bay-windowed, austere abodes, with porches surmounting steep flights of broad steps—when he saw an old, old man seated at the foot of one of these outer stairways. In summer, at that hour, every step would be occupied by people gasping for fresh, cool air; but in the depth of winter it was courting disease and death for anyone, especially the aged, to seek such repose.

The unusual spectacle stirred Power out of his mournful self-communing.

"Are you ill?" he said, halting in front of the patriarch.

"No, sorr," came the cheerful answer, and a worn, deeply lined face was raised to his with a smile that banished the ravages of time as sunlight gilds a ruin. A street-lamp was near, and its rays fell on features

which had once been strong and massive, but were now mellowed into the rare beauty of hale and kindly age. Silvery hair, still plentiful, and dark, keen eyes from which gleamed the intelligence and sympathy every clean-souled man may hope to gain if his years stretch beyond the span allotted by the prophet, made up a personality which would have appealed to an artist in search of a model.

"But you are taking a great risk by sitting on cold stone," persisted Power.

"Sure, sorr, av it's the will o' God that I should die that way, it's as good as anny other," said the ancient. "All doores ladin' to the next worruld are pretty much the same to me. I don't care which wan I take so long as it lades me safe into Purgathory."

Never before had Power heard so modest a claim on the benevolence of the Almighty.

"Are you tired of life, then?" he asked.

"Sorra a bit am I! Why should I be? Wouldn't it be flyin' in the face o' Providence to say that I was tired of the sivinty-eight grand years I've spint in raisonable happiness an' the best o' health."

"I like your philosophy. It has the right ring. But it can hardly be the will of God that you should shorten the remainder of those years by resting on a doorstep in this weather."

"Young man," said the other suddenly, "how old are ye?"

"Thirty-five."

"Thorty-foive is it? An' ye stand there an' talk as though ye'd just come down like Moses from the top o' Mount Sinai, an' had the worrd o' the Lord nately

written in yer pocketbook. Sure, thim days is past entirely. God doesn't talk to His sarvints anny longer in that way."

"Tell me, then, how does He talk?"

"Faix, sorr, I'm on'y a poor ould man, an' it's not for the likes o' me to insthruct a gintleman like you; but, av I'm not greatly mistaken, you've heard His voice more than wance or twice in yer life already, an' yer own heart 'll tell you betther than I can what it sounds like."

"Friend, your eyes are clearer than mine. Still, it will please me if you get up, and let me walk a little way with you. Or, if you don't feel able to walk, allow me to take you to your destination in a cab."

His new acquaintance rose, nimbly enough. Then Power saw that he had been using a bundle of newspapers as a cushion.

"A cab, is it?" laughed the other. "My! but money must come aisy your road, a thing it 'ud nivver do for me, thry as I might, an' I was a hard worrker in me time. But I'd sooner walk. I'm feelin' a thrifle shtiff, an' I haven't far to go."

"May I come with you?"

"Ye may, an' welcome. It's a mighty pleasant thing to have a fri'ndly chat wid a man who has sinse enough to wear fine clo'es an' talk like the aristocracy, an' yet not be ashamed to be seen sp'akin' to wan o' my sort."

"Will you think it rude if I inquire what you mean to do with those newspapers? Surely, at your age, you don't sell them in the streets."

"Faith, I'll have to thry my hand at it now, an' no mistake. Me grandson, Jimmy Maguire, was run over this afthernoon by an express van, an' he's up there at the hospital in West 16th Street. Jimmy is all that is left betune me an' the wall, an' I'm goin' now to give in his returns. Mebbe the newspaper folk will let me hould his stand till the docthors sind him out."

"And if they don't?"

"Sure, sorr, God is good to the poor Irish."

"I hope so, most sincerely. Still, a newspaper is a commercial enterprise, and the publisher may think you unequal to the job. What then?"

"Thin? I'd take a reef in me belt for breakfast, an' spind a p'aceful hour in the cathaydral, that dhrame in shtone up there on Fifth Avenue. Don't ye remimber that verse in the Psalms, 'I have been young, and now am old; yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken nor his seed begging bread.' Manny's the toime thim worrds have consoled me whin iverything looked black, an' I was throubled wid quare thoughts, bein' nigh famishin' wid hunger."

"Have you actually wanted food—here, in this great city?"

The old fellow laughed merrily. Evidently, he found the question humorous.

"Sure, I've had the misforchunes of Job," he said. "First, I lost me darlin' wife. Thin I lost me job as a buildher's foreman. I had two sons, and wan was dhrowned at say, an' the other was killed in a mine——"

"In a mine? What sort of mine?"

"A gold mine, at a place called Bison, in Colorado."

"When?"

"Nine years ago last Christmas?"

"Was his name Maguire?"

"No, sorr—Rafferty. A foine, upshtandin' boy he was, too."

Power recalled the incident. Indeed, he had helped to clear the rockfall which crushed the life out of the unfortunate miner. But he gave no sign of his knowledge.

"Why is your grandson named Maguire?" he went on.

"He is my daughther's son, an' she died in childbirth. More's the pity, because Maguire was a dacint man; but he took to the dhrink afther she was gone, an' that was the ind of him."

"Yet you are a firm believer in the goodness of Providence, notwithstanding all these cruel blows?"

"Musha, sorr," said Rafferty anxiously, "have ye nivver read the Book o' Job? Look at the thrials an' crosses put on that poor ould craythur, an' where would he have been if the thrue faith wasn't in him?"

"Rafferty, I would give ten years of my life to believe as you believe."

"Indade, sorr, ye needn't give tin minutes. Go home to yer room, an' sink down on your marrowbones, an' ax for help an' guidance, an' they'll be given you as sure as the sun will rise tomorrow. Though, moind ye, ye mayn't know it all at wance, just as it may be rainin' tomorrow, when the sun will be hid; but he'll be shinin' high up in the sky for all that."

The two crossed Sixth Avenue together, and Raf-

ferty pointed to a big building, a place ablaze with light and quivering with the activities of six-decker printing machines.

"That's where I'm goin'," he said. "Maybe they'll detain me some toime."

"Before we part, my friend, tell me where you live."

"Away over in the poorest part o' Twinty-sivinth Street, sorr."

"And how old is your grandson?"

"He'll be eleven next birthday."

"Is he seriously injured?"

Then tears came into the old man's eyes. For once his splendid courage wavered.

"They wouldn't tell me at the hospital, an' that's the truth, sorr; but a polisman who helped to pull him from undher the wagon said he thought he had escaped the worrst."

"Are you and Jimmy known to any of the priests at the cathedral?"

"Sure, sorr, don't they all know us? I remimber Canon M'Evoy comin' there twinty-foive years ago."

"And now, Rafferty, as one friend to another, will you let me help you?"

"Musha, an' is it beggin' you think I am?" and a gleam of Celtic fire shone through the mist of anguish.

"No. But you have given me good counsel tonight, and I am minded to pay for it."

"Faith, I haven't said a worrd that isn't plain for all min, an' women, too, to read, if they have a moind to look for it in the right place."

"Sometimes one needs reminding of that, and you have done it. Come, now. Let me finance you with a

few dollars, just to carry you along till Jimmy is around again."

Rafferty drew a knotted hand across his eyes, and then peered keenly into Power's face. What he saw there seemed to reassure him.

"Well, an' it's me that's the lucky man, an' no mistake!" he cried, while whole-hearted joy seemed to make him young again. "I'll take your help in the spirit it's offered in, sorr. If the situation was revarsed, I'd do what I could for you, because you have the look av a man who'd do unto others that which he wants others to do unto him. An', by that same token, I've as much chance av gettin' Jimmy's stand wid the papers as I have av bein' run for Prisident av the United States next fall."

Power took a folded note from his pocketbook.

"Put that where the cat can't get it," he said. "And now goodby, and thank you."

But something unusual in the aspect of the note caused Rafferty to open it.

"Sure, an' you were nearly committin' a terrible blundher!" he cried excitedly. "This is a hundred dollars, sorr, an' you'd be m'anin', mebbe, to give me a foive."

"No. Don't be vexed with me, but that amount of money will make things easy during the next month or so."

"The next month! Glory be to God, I can live like a prince for three months, on a hundred dollars!"

"I firmly believe that you will live better than most princes. . . . That's right. Stow it away carefully, and don't forget that I am still your debtor."

"Why, sorr, I can nivver repay you as long as I live."

"Oh, yes, you can. Remember me when you go to the cathedral tomorrow."

"Sorr, may I ax yer name?"

"Power—John Darien Power."

"Arrah, an' are ye Irish?"

"No."

"'Tis an Irish name, annyhow. But it matthers little what nation ye belong to. You're a rale Christian, an' 'tis writ in your face."

"There have been times when I would have doubted that; but the spirit of God has been abroad in New York tonight, and, perhaps, it has descended on me. Once more, goodby! I needn't wish you content, because you cinched that long ago."

"Ah, sorr, may Hivin bless ye! Manny's the heart you'll make light in this vale av tears, or I'm no judge av a man."

It seemed to Power's overwrought imagination as though Rafferty had suddenly assumed the guise and bearing of a supernatural being. Those concluding words rang in his ears as he hurried away. They had the sound of a message, an exhortation. The iron walls which appeared to encircle him had been cast down. His feet were set on an open road, fair and inviting, and he cared not whither it led so long as he escaped from the prison in which his soul might have been pent eternally.

Diving through a press of traffic, he reached the opposite side of a small square. A congestion of street-cars and other vehicles cleared during a brief interval,

and, looking back, he saw the old man standing motionless, gazing up at the sky. At that instant a ragged urchin, carrying a bundle of papers, seemed to recognize Rafferty, and spoke to him.

The Irishman, called back to earth, bent over the youth, and, evidently obeying a generous impulse, added his own store of "returns" to those of the boy, patted him on the head, and pointed to a doorway.

Power could have repeated with tolerable accuracy every word that passed, though the notable din of New York was quadrupled in that particular locality:

"Say, how's Jimmy, Mr. Rafferty?"

"Eh? Faix, he's mighty bad, but God is good, and mebbe he'll recover. Is it takin' in yer returns ye are? Well, now, here's some I don't want; so just add thim to yer own shtock, an' mind ye'll be afther takin' the money to yer mother. She needs it more'n I do, the poor sowl."

Then the man of faith recrossed Sixth Avenue, and was lost to sight.

In his room that night Power wrote to Marguerite:

"My dear Meg.—This is my first and last letter to you; so I pray you read it with sympathy. Today I bought a ring at a jeweler's intending it to be a token of our promised marriage. I am sending the ring, and I ask you to wear it in remembrance of one who must remain forever dead to you. The life of happiness we planned has turned to Dead Sea fruit; for I have been struck by a bolt from Heaven, and marriage becomes an impossibility. I would explain myself more clearly if explanation were not an insult. But I *must* say this—no man could have foreseen the calamity which has befallen me, which has laid in wait

throughout the long years to overwhelm me at last. That is all I dare tell you. Forgive me, dear one. I would not willingly cause you a pang; but Fate is stronger than I, and I am vanquished. Do you know me well enough to accept this statement in its crude truth? It cannot be gainsaid, it cannot be altered, time itself cannot assuage its rigors. Do not write to me. I have no fear of reproach, which would never come from your dear lips, but your strong, brave words would wring my very heartstrings. And yet, I love you, and will grieve till the end that you should have been reft from me. Farewell, then, my dear one.

Next morning he paid a visit to the clergy-house connected with the cathedral on Fifth Avenue. He asked a priest who received him if anything was known of an old man named Rafferty, who lived on West 27th Street, and had a grandson named Maguire.

"Yes," said the ecclesiastic. "I know Rafferty well, and esteem him most highly. In all New York there is no more God-fearing man."

Power smiled. "Fearing?" he questioned.

"Well, I accept the correction. 'Serving,' I should have said."

"And he really exists?"

"Undoubtedly. Why do you ask?"

"I fancied that, perhaps, the age of miracles had not passed."

"Who says it has?"

"Not I. But I come here for a specific purpose. I mean to provide Rafferty with the sum of fifteen dollars weekly while he lives, and, if his grandson recovers from an accident he sustained yesterday, a

further sum sufficient to maintain, clothe, and educate the boy until he is taught a trade. My banker will co-operate in a trust for this purpose. Will you, or one of your brotherhood, act with him?"

Thus it came to pass that Rafferty, like Job, was more prosperous in the end than in the beginning, and died when he was "old and full of days"; but he had lived five long years to bless the name of his benefactor.

That evening Power took train to the West. He prepared MacGonigal for his coming by a telegram, never thinking that an event which lay in the category of common things for him meant something akin to an earthquake at Bison. He was enlightened when a brass band, "headed by the mayor and a deputation of influential citizens" (see *Rocky Mountain News* of current date) met him at Bison station, where an address of welcome was read, the while MacGonigal and Jake beamed on a cheering multitude. At first Power was astonished and secretly annoyed; then he could not help but yield to the genuine heartiness of this civic welcome, which contrasted so markedly with his last dismal home-coming. He made a modest speech, expressing his real surprise at the community's progress, and promising not to absent himself again for so long a period.

Then he was escorted in a triumphal procession to the ranch. It was the organizers' intent that he should sit in an open carriage in solitary state, in order that thousands of people who had never seen him should feast their eyes on "the man who made Bison," while it was felt that, if he were not distracted by conversation, he would give more heed to local marvels in the

shape of trolley-cars, a town hall, a public library, a "Mary Power" institute, and a whole township of new avenues and streets.

But he declined emphatically to fall in with this arrangement, and, if his subconscious mind were not dwelling on less transient matters, might have been much amused by noting how MacGonigal, Jake, and the mayor (a man previously unknown to him) shared the honors of the hour. Nothing could have proved more distasteful personally than this joyous home-coming; yet he went through the ordeal with a quiet dignity that added to his popularity. For, singularly enough, he had not been forgotten or ignored in Bison. MacGonigal, the leader of every phase of local activity, never spoke in public that he did not refer to "our chief citizen, John Darien Power," and his name and personality figured in all matters effecting the town's rapid development.

He was deeply touched when he found the ranch exactly as he had left it. He imagined that Jake and his family were living there; but the overseer had built himself a fine house close at hand, and the Dolores homestead was altered in no respect, save that it seemed to have shrunk somewhat, owing to the growth of the surrounding trees and shrubberies.

When, at last, he and MacGonigal were left together in the room which was so intimately associated with vital happenings in his career, his stout partner brought off a remark which the ordered ceremony of the railroad depot had not permitted.

"Wall, ef I ain't dog-goned glad ter see ye ag'in, Derry!" he said, holding forth a fat fist for another

handshake. "But whar on airth did ye bury yerself? Between yer friend Mr. Dacre an' meself, the hull blame world was s'arched fer news of you; but you couldn't hev vanished more completely ef Jonah's whale had swallered you, or you'd been carried up to Heaven in a fiery chariot like Elijah."

"Hello, Mac!" cried Power, eying his elderly companion with renewed interest. "Whence this Biblical flavor in your speech? Have you taken a much-needed religious turn?"

"It's fer example, an' that's a fac', Derry. Sence you boosted me inter bein' a notorious char-ac-ter, I've kind o' lived up ter specification. Thar's no gettin' away from it. Ye can't deal out prizes to a row o' shiny-faced kids in a Sunday-school without larnin' some of the stock lingo, an' bits of it stick. But don't let's talk about me. I want ter hear about you. Whar hev you been?"

"It's a long story, Mac, and will take some telling. Just now, looking around at this room and its familiar objects, my mind goes back through the years. What did you say to Nancy when she wrote and asked what had become of me?"

MacGonigal, who had made quite a speech at the reception, and had been unusually long-winded during the drive, reverted suddenly to earlier habit.

"Who's been openin' old sores?" he inquired.

"No one. Nancy wrote to me before she died. That is all."

"Look-a here, Derry, why not leave it at that?"

"Unhappily, I cannot do otherwise. But I have a right to know exactly what happened."

"It wasn't such a heap. She cabled an' wrote, an' I had to tell her you was plumb crazy about—about yer mother's death. That was the on'y reason I could hand out fer your disappearin' act. Pore thing! Soon after she got my letter she gev in her own checks."

"Have you met Marten recently?"

"He was in Denver last fall."

"And the child—the little girl—did you see her?"

"Yep. Gosh, Derry, she's as like her mother as two peas in a pod."

"Is Marten fond of her?"

"Derry, that kid kin twist him round her little finger; but he's a hard man ter move any other way."

"Where does he live?"

"In Europe, fer the most part. He's out of mines an' rails—in the West, anyhow. Last I heerd, he was puttin' through a state loan fer the I-talians."

"Quite an international financier, eh?"

"That's what the papers call him. Guess it's Shakespeare's English fer a dog-goned shark."

"You know Willard is dead?"

"Know! Didn't I celebrate with a school-treat fer two thousand kids?"

"Mac! Haven't they taught you better than that at your Sunday-schools?"

"Thar's a proverb about skinnin' a Rooshan an' findin' a Tartar. That's me, all the time, when any any of that bunch shows up on the screen. What d'ye think Marten kem to Denver for?"

"I can't imagine."

"He wanted ter buy the ranch. No, not the mine," for MacGonigal misread the amazement in Power's

face, "just the ranch. Said he was anxious for little Nancy to own the property whar her mother lived as a gal."

"And what did you say—or do?"

"Handed him a joint straight outer the refrigerator, all fixed with mustard. 'Marten,' says I, just like that, 'Marten, ef you want yer little gal ter grow up good an' happy, don't let her suspicion thar's such a place as Dolores on the map. 'Why?' says he, lookin' black as thunder. 'Because,' says I, 'it's well named when thar's one of the Willard family on the location. Ef any children kin play around here an' be happy, they'll be Derry Power's, not yours. Sorry, Derry, ef ye didn't wish me ter rile him; but, till you was given up fer good, the one spot in Colorado his money couldn't buy was this yer house an' land."

And again did MacGonigal fail to interpret his hearer's expression, nor did he ever understand the tragic import of his words. The story of Nancy's transgression was buried with her, and the grave seldom gives up its secrets. Moreover, was she not nearly seven years dead? And seven years of death count in the scale of forgetfulness as against seventy and seven of life.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE SECOND GENERATION

Marguerite Sinclair did not write. Perhaps, tucked away in a corner of Power's heart, a tender little shoot of hope that she might be moved to disobedience and revolt blossomed for awhile. But it soon withered. She did not break the silence he had imposed on her. The quiet weeks passed. The vessel in which the girl and her father had traveled to London had already returned to South America; but never a word came from Marguerite. So far as externals went, Power seemed to have settled down again to the life of the student and the recluse from which he had been so rudely withdrawn. Beyond a rearrangement with Jake, whereby that pillar of the community was given the stock-raising business, while Power retained only the ranch, together with the paddocks and orchards in its immediate vicinity, there was no change in affairs at Bison. MacGonigal was offered a controlling interest in the mine; but he scoffed at the proposal. The proceeds of his third share would amount to nearly quarter of a million dollars for the current year, and his personal expenditure did not exceed a fifth of that sum.

"It's the Scot blood in me," he explained, when people rallied him as to his saving habits. "My great-grandfather lost a sixpence one day in Belfast, an' the

family has been makin' good ever sence. Thar ain't no sixpences here; so I run a dime bank. Another thing," and his bulging eyes challenged dispute, "it's a bully fine notion ter let well enough alone. This yer proposition is goin' along O. K. Let her rip!"

Power, of course, was accumulating wealth with every turn of the rolls in the reduction mills. The name of the mine became a standing joke in Colorado. "What price the El Preço outfit?" men would say, and spoke with bated breath of the millions it would bring in the open market. Not only were there almost unlimited supplies of rich ore in sight, but the very granite containing the main vein itself yielded handsomely under low-grade treatment. It seemed impossible that the undertaking should go wrong at any stage. If water was tapped, it went to irrigate new lands which MacGonigal had added to the ranch. If a new shaft was sunk, sufficient pay-ore was taken out of the excavation to meet the cost; whereas, in ninety-nine mines among a hundred, the charge would have fallen on capital.

For three months Power lay fallow at Dolores. His bodily vigor was unimpaired; but his mind demanded the restorative tonic of peace. A Chicago bookstore sent him the hundred most important books which had been published during his absence from civilization, and, with their aid, he supplemented Marguerite's lessons, and soon brought himself abreast of contemporary thought. Beyond establishing a maternity hospital in Bison, and renewing the grant to Dr. Stearn's poor, he did not embark in philanthropic schemes to any great extent. Still, he found pressing need of

a secretary, and secured an excellent assistant in a Harvard undergraduate, a young man whose brilliant career in the university was brought to a dramatic close by an automobile accident which crippled him for life. He was one of the first victims of the new force. Power had never seen a motor-car until he reached New York. The industry had sprung into being when he was immured in the Andes. Even yet it was in the experimental stage, and his secretary, Wilmot Richard Howard, was testing an improved steering-gear when he was smashed up by a hostile lumber wagon.

The post Power offered him was a veritable godsend, and he, in his way, became infinitely useful to his employer. A curious sympathy soon existed between them. The limitations of Howard's maimed body caused him to understand something of the cramped outlook before Power's maimed soul. Moreover, within a month, his wide reading and thorough acquaintance with the world's current topics filled gaps in Power's knowledge which books alone could not repair. When Power quitted Bison in the spring of the year none who did not know his history would ever have suspected that he had dwelt so long apart from his fellowmen.

The two traveled together. Halting in New York for a few hours only, they crossed the Atlantic in the *Lucania*. They remained in London a week, living in one of those small and most exclusive West End hotels whose patrons come and go without the blare of trumpets in the press which is the penalty, or reward, of residence in the more noteworthy caravansaries. Lon-

don, it is true, is the one city in the world where a millionaire can mingle unnoticed with the crowd; but Power took no risk of undue publicity. Once, in later years, a newspaper discovered him, and blazoned forth to all and sundry the status he occupied in Colorado; thenceforth, Howard arranged matters in his own name, and hotel managers and hall-porters bowed to him as the holder of the purse.

From London, reinforced by a first-rate valet, the pair went to Devon. There, in a wooded comb looking out over the Atlantic, they found Dacre, the one man living in whose ears Power could to some extent unburden his heart. From him were forthcoming certain details as to Nancy's end; for he had happened to dine one evening with the physician who attended her constantly after her arrival in England, and the doctor, little guessing how well informed his neighbor was as to Mrs. Marten's antecedents, had entered into particulars of what he described as "a case that presented unusual and baffling features."

"From what he told me, I gathered that she must have pined away from the moment she left you in the Adirondacks," said Dacre. "I realize now that she not only fretted herself into a low state of health, but practically gave her life to her child. No wonder the doctor was puzzled! He could not diagnose her ailment; for who would have suspected that a young, beautiful, and rich woman was resolved to die? Now, knowing what we do know, we can see that it was better so. She would never again have lived with Marten as his wife, and there was bound to be trouble sooner or later. Dear lady! I have often thought

of her, and of you. Sometimes, when that most misleading faculty called common sense urged that you, too, must be dead, I have pictured your meeting in the great beyond. Indeed, it is the hope of such reunions that accounts for mortal belief in immortality. Remember, I also have paced the Via Dolorosa, and I prize those hours, above all others, in which I dream of a kingdom where wrongs are adjusted by an all-wise Intelligence, and the wretched failures of earthly life are dislodged from memory by some divine anodyne."

There was silence for awhile. The two men were talking in a restful, old-fashioned room which commanded a far-flung view of the Atlantic. Howard, whose acute sensibility might always be trusted in such moments, had betaken himself to the garden with an amiable collie, and the friends were free to talk without restraint.

Then Dacre essayed a cheerier note. "We can't help dwelling on these things," he said; "but I would remind you that you are still a young man, and it is a nice question, whether, when all is said and done, you are justified in binding yourself forever to a pale ghost. It is a poetic conceit; but the eugenist would tell you that you ought to marry."

"I shall never marry," said Power.

Nancy's secret would be buried with him, and that fact alone burked any reference to Marguerite Sinclair. Dacre was exceedingly shrewd, and could hardly fail to reach the correct conclusion if he heard that "the other woman" did actually exist, and that circumstances of recent discovery alone prevented the contemplated marriage.

"Ah, well!" sighed the older man, relapsing into Power's mood. "This is a genuine instance of the pot advising the kettle not to be black. How do you purpose spending your time?"

"I'll tell you. I mean to do some good in the world. But I have not come here to bore you with humane projects. I've not forgotten that you are a yachtsman. Say you agree, and I'll hire a yacht to take us up the west coast of Scotland and across the North Sea to the fiords."

"Spoken like a prince! It is the very thing I'm longing for; but my purse won't run to it, and I'm rather too old to fraternize with Cockney excursionists on David MacBrayne's steamers or Cook's tourists in Norway."

So the friends passed an enjoyable summer, and liked the yacht so well that they cruised south by way of Holland, Belgium, and France, and wintered in the Mediterranean. Then Power and his secretary hied them to Bison again; whence their next journey headed east. They visited flower-laden Honolulu, panting Japan, gray China, and golden India. Pitching his tent where he listed, Power saw mankind in the mass. Everywhere, even in climes where Nature is prodigal of her gifts, there was misery to be softened, suffering to be alleviated, men and women in want and worthy of help. His methods were simple in the extreme. Attracting little or no attention by display of wealth, he and Howard studied every problem that seemed to call for solution by money wisely applied. At the last moment—often when he had departed to some far distant place—Power would send

the needed sum to the right quarter. Thus, remaining almost unknown, he left a trail of well-doing behind him in the four corners of the globe. Sometimes, when the written or printed word insisted on making him famous, if Bison was too remote a sanctuary, he would disappear for many months on end, either hob-nobbing with Dacre in Devonshire or elsewhere, or taking protracted tours in out-of-the-way countries like East Africa, Siberia, or the Balkans.

Naturally, he had adventures and misadventures. No man can scour the earth, year in and year out—be he rich as Crœsus or kindly as Francis d'Assisi—without enduring vicissitudes, whether they arise from the haphazard casualties of travel or are the outcome of sheer human perversity.

In Nairobi, he had the narrowest escape from being mauled by a lion; his boat was wrecked in a rapid of the Yang-tse-Kiang, and a Chinese coolie saved him from death by diving after him when he sank, stunned by collision with a rock; in the town of Omsk, in Eastern Siberia, he was lodged in a fever-stricken prison for interfering between a brutal Cossack officer and a female political prisoner whom the man was flogging mercilessly with a knout. On this occasion Howard rescued him by bribing every official in sight. His worst experience came in a Rumelian Christian village. Howard found that certain saline mud baths on the coast of the Adriatic exercised a highly beneficial effect on his injured spine; so Power left him there, to undergo a complete course of treatment, and traveled alone in the interior. By ill luck, he was benighted in a miserable hamlet near Adrianople. Dur-

ing the night the Turkish authorities learned that smallpox was rife among the inhabitants. They established a cordon, and drove back at the point of the bayonet all who attempted to leave the place. For six weeks Power lived in a pesthouse; but the Andean sap rose again in his bones, and he reorganized the habits of the community so thoroughly that its survivors regarded him as a man sent by God for their deliverance.

Thus, doing good by stealth, and ever widening his knowledge of mankind, he passed thirteen busy years. It would serve no useful purpose to go more fully into the records of that long and fruitful period of his life. Though crammed with incident and rich in the vivid tints of travel in many lands, it calls for none other than the briefest summary in a narrative which, at the best, can deal only with the chief phases of a remarkable career.

He was in his forty-eighth year, and was paying a deferred visit to Dacre, when he entered upon the last, and in some respects the greatest, of his trials. Howard was in London, showing the sights to some relations, and Power had elected to motor to Devonshire. His chauffeur, a tall, well-built youngster who answered to the name of Maguire—being, in fact, Rafferty's grandson—was eager to test a car which was supposed to possess every mechanical virtue, and Power was not disinclined for the run through a June England. Nothing daunted by the prospect of twelve hours' continuous excess of the speed limit, master and man determined to reach Devonshire in the day. But the machine decided differently. Two burst tires

cost them a couple of hours on the road, and a speck of grit in a valve caused such trouble that it became necessary to stop for the night in a town where careful overhauling of the engine was practicable; so they ran slowly into Bournemouth, and there, in one of the big hotels on the cliff, Power met his own daughter.

He thought, and not without reason, that he was the victim of hallucination. He had halted for a moment in a soft-carpeted corridor to look at a spirited painting of wild ponies in the New Forest, when a door opened close at hand. He heard no footstep; but the rustle of a dress caught his ear, and he moved aside to permit the passing of some lady of whose presence he was only half conscious. But a sudden impulse—perhaps due to the action of the magnetic waves which link certain kindred individualities without their personal cognizance—caused him to turn and look at the stranger, and he saw—Nancy!

The light in the corridor was dim—for instance, he had been obliged to peer closely at the picture before he could decipher the artist's signature—but there was no mistaking the extraordinary resemblance which this girl bore to the Nancy Willard of the Dolores Ranch days, the Nancy with whom he used to gallop along prairie tracks where now ran the steel ribbons of electrically propelled street-cars, Nancy as he knew her before he had won and lost her twice.

The shock of recognition was so unexpected that he reeled under it. Then, seeing that the girl was evidently wondering why he was looking at her so strangely, he forced himself to walk on toward his own apartment.

There, when calmer thought became possible, he realized that he had seen Nancy's child, a girl now in her twentieth year. She was so like her mother at the same age that there was no possibility of error on his part. The same glory of golden-brown hair, the same changeful eyes of blende Kagoul blue, the same winsome features, the same graceful carriage—he could not be mistaken. And, to make more fierce the fire that was consuming him, he had again found a subtle hint of Marguerite Sinclair in the sprightly maid who had passed him so silently and swiftly. He smiled with a sort of bitter weariness when it dawned on him that this vision would probably control the future course of his life. He was face to face with Destiny again. There was less chance of escape for him now than for the sailor swept from the gale-submerged deck of a tramp steamer in mid-Atlantic, because miracles did sometimes happen at sea; but, where he was concerned, Fate planted her snares so cunningly that he was always fast pinioned before he even suspected their existence.

"I am fey today. I peer into a dim future. Some day, somehow, you will understand that which is hidden from my ken."

He could not comprehend the full meaning of those words yet; but the day of reckoning was at hand. Well, it was better so. Surely the settlement would be final this time!

He was minded to dine in [illegible]acy; but he was no coward, and the inclination was dismissed as unworthy. So he dressed with care, reached the crowded dining-room rather late, and was allotted to a small table

near a window. In that particular window was a party of six, and among them were Marten and the girl. She raised her eyes when Power entered, and a look of recognition came into them. On her right sat a small, polished, olive-skinned man, who seemed to be more engrossed in her company than she in his. The faces of these three were clearly visible from Power's place; the others, two women and a man, were not so much in evidence.

He strove to catch some of the girl's accents; but she spoke but little, and that in a low tone. She gave him the impression of being among people whom she disliked, but whose presence had to be endured. Once or twice she addressed Marten, and then her manner reminded him more than ever of her mother. To all appearance, father and daughter were wrapped up in each other, and Power knew not whether to rejoice or be sad because of it. Martin looked old and worn. He showed every one of his sixty years. The burden of finance may be even weightier than that of empire.

Power's mind ran back to the night, just twenty years before, when he sat at a table in another hotel and found Nancy Marten gazing at him. Skies and times may change, but not manners. He had met mother and daughter under precisely similar conditions, save that he was alone now, and a complete stranger to the girl. Marten was so taken up with his friends that he gave no attention to others in the room. Perhaps he had trained himself to that useful habit. At any rate, he glanced Power's way only once, and obviously regarded him as one among the well-dressed throng.

Later, in a lounge where people smoked, chatted,

drank coffee, or played bridge to the accompaniment of an excellent band, Power contrived to pass close behind the girl's chair. She was with one of the women now, and talking animatedly. Yes, she had her mother's voice! What long dormant chords of memory it touched! How it vibrated through heart and brain! Nancy—dead and yet speaking!

Next morning the car, in chastened mood, bore him smoothly and quickly away through the Hampshire pines and the blossom-laden hedges of Somerset. He reached Dacre's house early in the afternoon, and was somewhat surprised when his friend suggested that they should start forthwith on a rambling tour up the Wye Valley and thus to the lakes by way of North Wales.

This spirit of unrest was so unlike Dacre's wonted air of repose that it evoked a question.

"I have just come here to escape from the ceaseless rush of things," said Power. "Why do you want to bustle me off so promptly?"

"I thought a change of scene might be good for both of us," was the offhand answer.

"Yet it is only a week since you wrote and reproached me for neglecting the Devon moors. I can slay you with your own quotation. You bade me join you in—

> 'This other Eden, demi-paradise,
> This fortress built by Nature for herself'—

and now you would have us cavort along dusty highways to other joys. Why is it?"

"My quotation applied to the whole of this sceptered isle."

"You are quibbling, Dacre, and I think I guess the reason. Have you heard anything of Marten recently?"

His companion did not try to conceal the surprise that leaped to his eyes.

"Your Indians made you a bit of wizard," he said. "I'll tell you now what I meant to hide from you. Marten has rented Lord Valescure's place on the hill yonder, and is due here tomorrow or next day. I heard the name of the new tenant only this morning, and decided that we ought to quit if we want to be happy."

"No. If you'll let me, I'll remain."

"Is it wise?"

"I endured the major wrench last night. Marten and—and his daughter were staying in the same hotel as myself."

"So you have seen her—at last?"

"Yes, and I'll confess my weakness. Having seen her, I wish to speak to her. I admit my folly; but I cannot help it. Somehow—I think—that her mother—would wish it. I'll placate Marten, grovel to him, if I may be allowed to meet her."

"My dear Derry, I've said my say. You ought to have lived two thousand years ago, and Euripides would have immortalized you in a tragedy."

The eyes of the two men clashed; but Power repressed the imminent request for an explanation of that cryptic remark. He dared not ask what Dacre had in mind. His comment might have been a chance shaft; but it fell dangerously near the forbidden territory of Nancy's close-veiled secret. When next he

spoke, it was to give a motorist's account of the mishaps of the road.

A week passed. Dacre's house lay halfway up a wooded comb, or valley, and the Valescure castle stood on a bold tor that thrust itself bluntly into the sea. Unless the occupants of each place were on friendly terms, they might dwell in the same district and not meet once in a year. By taking a rough path they were barely three-quarters of a mile apart; but the only practicable carriage-road covered three miles or more. Dacre's interests lay with the fisher-folk at the foot of the comb or among the woods and heather of Dartmoor Forest, rolling up into the clouds behind his abode, while the great folk of the castle seldom came his way, unless Lord Valescure happened to be in residence, when the two forgathered often.

But Dacre was right when he hinted at the tragic inevitableness of his friend's life. They had strolled into the rectory for tea, and were chatting with their hostess about a forthcoming charity fête, when a motor rumbled to the door, and Nancy Marten appeared, a radiant vision in the muslin and flower-decked hat of summer.

"How kind of you to come!" said the rector's wife, rising to greet the girl. "Lady Valescure said she was sure I might write and seek your help for our village revel. She said all sorts of nice things about you, and now I know they are true."

So Power was introduced to "Miss Marten," and the girl gave him one of those shy yet delightfully candid glances which he remembered so well in her mother's eyes.

"Didn't I meet you recently in the corridor of a hotel at Bournemouth?" she asked.

"Yes," he said.

"Then you will be surprised to hear that you rather startled me. I thought you were about to fall, and was on the point of catching your arm when you walked away. Then I saw you had a slight limp, and it was that which had probably caused my stupid notion. Wouldn't you have been tremendously astonished if a giddy young person had clutched you suddenly and implored you not to drop at her feet?"

"Yet I can well imagine any man, especially a younger sprig than myself, being moved to some such act of homage."

She laughed—Nancy again!

"There seems to be no end of men in England who can pay neat compliments to a woman," she said. "But you're not an Englishman, Mr. Power. Aren't you a fellow-countryman of mine?"

"Yes."

"How jolly! People never guess it, but I'm an American; though I can never be President, even if we women get a vote, because I was born in London. But my parents hail from the Silver State."

"Where more gold is produced than in any other state of the Union."

"Then you know Colorado?"

"Yes. Better than that, I knew your mother many years ago, before her marriage."

"You knew my mother—in Colorado—on the ranch! Well!" She turned rapidly to her hostess. "Thank you ever so much for inviting me here today. I'll

work like a slave for your bazaar. Here is the man I've been aching to meet ever since I was able to talk. Please don't think me rude if I monopolize him all the afternoon. I'm going to take him off to that nice shady seat under the copper beech, and question him until he cries for mercy. . . . Yes, please. Tea, with sugar and milk, and lots of bread and butter, piled high with Devonshire cream and jam—all the good things! Why, you're a veritable fairy princess. Mr. Power met my mother when she was a girl! . . . Come along, Mr. Power! No wonder I was inclined to grab you in that corridor. Oh, had I but guessed! I'll never, never distrust intuition again."

"To begin with," said Power, as he walked with her across the springy turf with a laden tray in his hands, "in what way did intuition prompt you?"

"I don't mind telling you at once. I feel I can talk to you as though we had known each other always. I said you rather startled me; but that was just a polite way of saying what I didn't exactly mean. You were examining a picture, and you turned unexpectedly and looked at me. There was an expression in your eyes that gave me a sort of shock, one of those emotional thrills which cannot be described in words. You might have been gazing at the ghost of someone very dear to you. Ah, forgive me if my tongue runs away with me, but I'm really excited. Of course, I understand now. You took me for my mother. And I am like her, am I not?"

"So like that your first impression was right. I did nearly fall. The least push would have toppled me over. It was only the iron law of convention that

enabled me to pass on as though nothing unusual had happened."

"Then my mother and you were great friends?"

"Yes."

"You met her long before she was married?"

"Yes."

"Don't say yes, and leave it at that. Tell me things—everything you think I would like to know."

"I may tell you this, without the slightest unfairness to—to your father. I loved your mother; but I was poor in those days, and dared not ask her to marry me. Then I was sent away to a distant mine—and—we drifted apart. When next I saw her she was a wife. Now, suppose we forget that bit of ancient history—because I hope to become friendly with your father—for your sake."

The girl's eyes were glistening, and she had lost some of her exquisite color.

She understood, or thought she understood; though she little dreamed what fierce longings, what vain regrets, were surging through the man's inmost core. Her quick intelligence noted certain slight hesitancies in his speech, which the ever-present feminine sense of romance attributed to tender recollections of the bygone days. With ready sympathy, she led him to talk of the ranch, of Bison, even of her grandfather, whom she remembered but vaguely.

Power kept a close guard on his words, and easily focused her interest on topics which could not prove hurtful, even if she repeated the conversation to Marten in its entirety. Once only did their chat veer round to a dangerous quarter.

"You said you saw my mother again after her marriage—where was that?" she asked.

"In Newport, Rhode Island. I went there to buy horses, and we met unexpectedly in a hotel, just as you and I the other evening."

"Was she—was she happy?"

"Of course she was happy. She was one of the most beautiful women of her day, and married to a rich man who was certainly devoted to her. She moved in the best society, both in America and in Europe. By the way, her closest friends were the Van Raltens in the States and the Duchesse de Brasnes in Paris. Have you ever come across any members of those families?"

"I know Mrs. Van Ralten very well. Her daughter was at school with me at Brussels."

"Then Mr. Marten hardened his heart, and parted from you for a time?"

"Yes. I see now that it was bad for a girl to be always at home or in hotels, with governesses. Fortunately, Father had to be away a good deal, in Russia and elsewhere; so I was sent to school, where I was taught what little I know."

Thus was an unforeseen shoal safely navigated, and Power took care that Newport was lost sight of. As he and Dacre walked up the valley to their abode, the latter broke a long silence by saying:

"Again I ask, Derry—is it wise?"

"And again I answer that years of suffering entitle one to the fleeting pleasure of seeing and speaking to Nancy's daughter."

"But she is Marten's daughter, too, and he may prove difficult."

"Let him. I have fought stronger adversaries, and won through in the end."

Secretary Howard joined them that night. After dinner he inquired if Power had ever had any dealings with Mowlem & Son, a firm of lawyers in New York.

"No," said Power. "The name is not familiar to me."

"Queer thing! A man who represented himself as their London agent called at my hotel yesterday and inquired if it was correct that you were in Devonshire. I said yes, and asked his business. He explained that Mowlem & Son wanted to know, and that was all he could, or would, tell me. I was inclined to believe him."

"Perhaps it is the usual hue and cry after a bloated capitalist."

"I rather fancy not. This fellow seemed to lay stress on your presence here. Besides, the company-promoting crowd have learned long since that you are unapproachable."

"At such a moment one might mention a peak in Darien," laughed Dacre, and the incident lapsed into the limbo of insignificant happenings.

Thenceforth Power met Nancy day after day. The approaching fête supplied the girl with a ready excuse for these regular visits to village and rectory. Power believed, though he did not seek enlightenment, that she had not spoken of him to her father. One day, when she was accompanied by the sleek, olive-skinned man

he had seen at Bournemouth, she rather avoided him, and he ascertained from an awe-stricken rustic that the stranger was a prince, but of what dynasty his informant could not say.

At their next meeting he rallied the girl on her aloofness. She withered him with an indignant glance.

"Come!" she said imperiously, taking him from the schoolhouse in which a committee was assembled, and making for the tiny stone pier which sheltered a small estuary from southwesterly gales.

"I've got to tell you some day, and you may as well know now," she said, with a curious hardness of tone which she had probably acquired from Marten by the trick of association. "You loved my mother, and ought to have married her. If all was nice and providential in the best of all possible worlds, you would have been my father. Oh, you needn't flinch because I say that! If you *were* my father, I'm sure you wouldn't force me to marry a man I detest. That person who came with me yesterday is the high and mighty Principe del Montecastello. I have to marry him, and I hate him!"

Power's face went very pale. His hour had struck. He looked out over a smiling ocean; but the eyes of his soul saw a broken vista of barren hills, snow-crowned and glacier-ribbed, while howling torrents rushed through the depths of ravines choken with the débris of avalanches and rotting pines. His own voice sounded hollow and forlorn in his ears.

"In these days no woman need marry a man she hates," he was saying, aware of a dull effort to ward off a waking nightmare by the spoken word.

"You know better than that," she retorted, with the bitter logic of youth. "What am I to do? The man I love, and would marry if I could, is poor. He is too honorable to—to—— Oh, I don't know what I mean—only this, that a millionaire's daughter can be bought and sold like any other girl, even a princess, when what men call 'important interests' are at stake."

"You say you have chosen another man?" he said brokenly.

"Yes, the dearest boy. Oh, Mr. Power, I wish you knew him! I have faith in you. Perhaps you could help—if only for my dear mother's safe."

She was crying now; but her streaming eyes sought his with wistful confidence.

"Yes. I will help, for your dear mother's sake," he said. "Be brave, and drive away those tears. They —they hurt. I—I saw your mother crying once. Now tell me everything. If I would be of any real assistance, I must know how to shape my efforts."

CHAPTER XIX

THE SETTLEMENT

NANCY'S pitiful little story was soon told. During the last year she had often met the Honorable Philip Lindsay, second son of an impoverished Scottish peer, and now a lieutenant in a line regiment stationed at Aldershot. They discovered each other, in the first instance, at a hunt ball in Leicestershire, and a simple confusion of names led the man to believe that the pretty girl with the blue eyes was the hired companion of the daughters of the family with whom she was staying. Her friends—like herself, just emancipated from the schoolroom—fostered the deception, which she and they found amusing; but Lindsay's Celtic blood was fired by the knowledge that he had found the one woman in the world he wanted to marry, be she poor as Cinderella. Before the girl realized that the handsome young soldier was not of the carpet-knight type, he was telling her he loved her, and asking her to wait for him till he got his captaincy or secured an adjutant's berth in a territorial battalion, and they would wed.

Of course, there were explanations, and tears, and a good deal of the white-lipped tragedy of youth. Lindsay, like a gallant gentleman, refused to be dubbed a fortune-hunter, and went back to his regiment, where he threw himself into the dissipation of musketry in-

struction with a cold fury that surprised and gratified his colonel. Then Nancy found that her heart had gone with him, and wrote a tearful request that they might never meet again; whereupon the sprite who controls these affairs brought Marten and his daughter to a grand review at Windsor—and who should be on some notable general's staff but Lieutenant the Honorable Philip Lindsay? After that the veriest tyro in the methods of romance must see that the general would invite the American millionaire to dine with him that evening, and that Lindsay should be allotted to Nancy as her dinner partner.

There were thrills, and flashing glances; but Caledonia remained both stern and wild, with the certain result that he and the girl grew more desperately enamoured of each other than ever.

But this is not the love-story of a new Derry and another Nancy; so it may be taken for granted that twenty-four and nineteen were suffering the approved pangs, and were given every opportunity to develop the recognized symptoms. Our real concern lies with a man of middle age, around whom these minor happenings revolved like comets around the sun—itself ever fleeting into stellar depths. Not that Power felt any resemblance to a star of magnitude at that time. Though he never doubted that he was again at the mercy of irresistible forces, dragging him he knew not whither, the simile that presented itself to his mind was that of a log being swept over a cataract. Despite his brave promise to the weeping girl, he had no plan, no hope of successful intervention. He caught at one straw as the swirling current gripped him.

This Italian prince might be a very excellent fellow, and the soldier a bit of knave; then it would be his bounden duty to exhort Nancy to filial obedience, that time-honored principle productive of so much good and so great evils.

"What is Mr. Lindsay's address?" he inquired.

She told him.

"And is there any real need for present anxiety? You are far too young to think of marriage."

"Father says my mother was wed at twenty. He got rather angry when I retorted that she died at twenty-four. But the real trouble is that that horrid Giovanni Montecastello is pressing for an engagement. Father spoke of it this morning. No wonder I am in such a rebellious mood!"

"Does Mr. Marten know Lindsay?"

"Yes. He regards him merely as one of the thousand nice young men one meets in London society."

"He is not aware of his attachment for you?"

She raised her hands in horror. Clearly, Hugh Marten was master in his own household. His daughter might be the apple of his eye; but he brooked no interference with his perfected schemes, even from her.

"At any rate," persisted Power, "he will not compel you to accept Prince Montecastello tomorrow, or next day. Can't you hold out until, say, your twentieth birthday?"

"This morning I promised to decide within a month."

"And what did he say?"

"He smiled, and remarked that I chose my words

carelessly. Evidently I meant 'accept' when I said 'decide.'"

"Well, then, we have a month. Great things can be achieved in that time. Fortresses which have taken ten years to build have fallen in a day. So be of good cheer. I begin the attack at once."

"Will you please tell me what you intend doing?"

"Firstly, I must see my army, which is composed of one man, Philip Lindsay. Secondly, we must call on the citadel to surrender. Your father is not aware that Mr. Lindsay may be his prospective son-in-law. He must be enlightened."

"There will be an awful row," declared Nancy, unconsciously reverting to the slang of a dismayed schoolgirl.

"The capture of a stronghold is usually accompanied by noise and clamor. What matter, so long as it yields?"

"And afterward?"

"Afterward, like every prudent general, I shall be guided by events. Come, now; we'll go down to the beach, and you shall dab your eyes with salt-water."

"Is that a recipe to cure red eyes?"

"It's an excuse for blue ones showing a red tint."

The girl smiled pathetically. "Somehow," she said, "I always feel comforted after a talk with you. You haven't known it, Mr. Power; for I have been forced to conceal my troubles; but every time we meet you send me away in a more assured frame of mind."

She, in turn, did not know that he winced as if she had struck him. Truly, he was paying a heavy reckoning for the frenzy and passion of those far-off days

in the Adirondacks, and, worst of all, the seeming ashes of that ardent fire threatened to blaze out anew.

As they walked back to the village they encountered a well-dressed man, a stranger. By this time Power was so thoroughly acquainted with the little hamlet's inhabitants that he recognized some by name and all by sight; but this man was unknown to him.

That evening Howard said, "By the way, you remember an inquiry from Mowlem & Son, New York? The man who made it was in the village today. I saw him, soon after Miss Marten and you strolled on to the beach."

Power described the stranger, and Howard identified him; but the matter was dismissed as a trivial coincidence. Indeed, Power had affairs of moment to occupy him. Dacre, it appeared, was primed with facts concerning the Principe del Montecastello.

"His people are the famous Lombardy bankers," he said. "I have an idea, based on ethnological theories, that they belonged originally to one of the ten tribes; but they were ennobled during the seventeenth century, and remained highly orthodox Blacks till the present king came to the throne, when they 'verted to the Whites.* I believe that this change came about owing to their association with Marten in an Italian loan. Anyhow, the existing scion of the princely house is rather a bad hat. Why are you interested in him?"

"He is a suitor for the hand of a young lady whose welfare I have at heart."

*The Papal and Constitutional parties in Italy are often differentiated thus briefly.

"Not Nancy?"

"Yes."

"The devil he is!" and Dacre expressed his sentiments freely. "Why, I'd prefer she married our local road-mender; because then, at least, she would have a decent, clean-minded husband. Marten must be losing grip. Confound it! Why doesn't he go to Paris or Naples, and find out this fellow's antecedents? I feel it's absurd to doubt you, but can you really trust your informant?"

"I have it from Nancy's own lips."

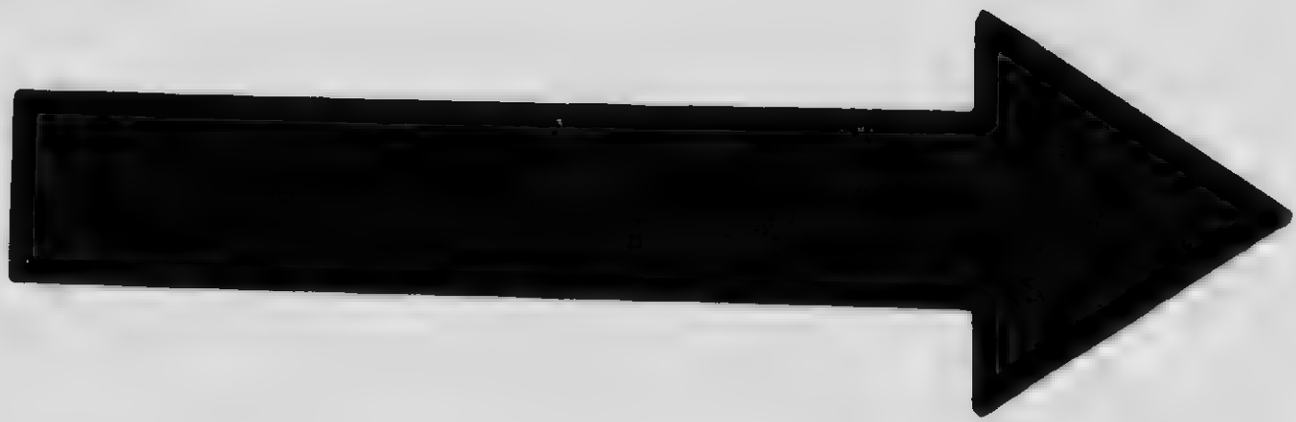
"Oh, dash it all! Can nothing be done to stop it?"

"Much, I hope. Tell Howard what you know, and he will start for the Continent at once to verify it. Meanwhile, may I invite a friend to come here to-morrow?"

"Need you ask? We can put up six more at a pinch. But I can't get over Montecastello's infernal impertinence. Yet, it's fully in accordance with Italian standards of right and wrong. Your young count or princeling can live like a pig until matrimony crops up. Then he becomes mighty particular. The bride must bring not only her dowry, but an unblemished record as well. I suppose, in the long run, it is a wise thing. Were it not for some such proviso, half the aristocracy of Europe would disappear in two generations."

Power passed no comment; but he sent the following letter by the night post:

"Dear Mr. Lindsay.—Miss Nancy Marten, who is staying at Valescure Castle, near this house, has honored me



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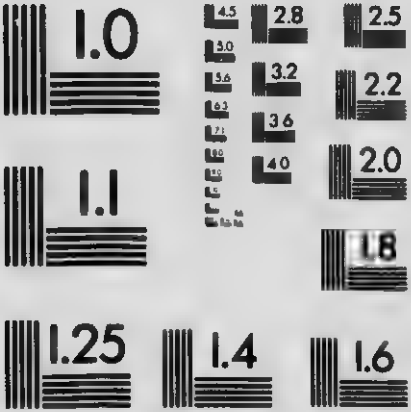

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by asking my advice and help in a matter that concerns herself and you. She has done this because I am her friend, and was her mother's friend years ago in Colorado. Can you get leave from your regiment for a few days, and come here? I believe you army men can plead urgent private affairs, and there is little doubt as to the urgency and privacy of this request. I make one stipulation. You are not to communicate with Miss Nancy Marten until you have seen me.

"Sincerely yours,

"JOHN DARIEN POWER."

He passed a troubled and sleepless night. Dacre's careless if heated words had sunk deep. They chimed in oddly with a thought that was not to be stilled, a thought that had its genesis in a faded letter written twenty years ago.

When Howard went to London next day he took with him a cablegram, part in code and part in plain English. It's text was of a peculiarity that forbade the use of a village postoffice; for it ran, when decoded:

"MacGonigal, Bison, Colorado.—Break open the locked upper right-hand drawer of the Japanese cabinet in sitting-room, Dolores, and send immediately by registered mail the long sealed envelop marked 'To be burnt, unopened, by my executors,' and signed by me."

Then followed Power's code signature and his address.

A telegram arrived early. It read:

"Will be with you 4.30 today. LINDSAY."

So the witches' caldron was a-boil, and none might tell what strange brew it would produce.

Lindsay came. Nancy had described him aptly. The British army seems to turn out a certain type of tall, straight, clean-limbed, and clear-eyed young officer as though he were cast in a mold. Power appraised him rightly at the first glance—a gentleman, who held honor dear and life cheap, a man of high lineage and honest mind, a Scot with a fox-hunting strain in him, a youngster who would put his horse at a shire fence or lead his company in a forlorn hope with equal nonchalance and determination—not, perhaps, markedly intellectual, but a direct descendant of a long line of cavaliers whose all-sufficing motto was, "God, and the King."

The two had a protracted discussion. Power felt that he must win this somewhat reserved wooer's confidence before he broached the astounding project he had formed.

"I take it," he said, at last, seeing that Lindsay was convinced he meant well to Nancy, "I take it Lord Colonsay cannot supplement the small allowance he now makes you?"

"No. It's not to be thought of. Scottish estates grow poorer every decade. Even now Dad makes no pretense of supporting a title. He lives very quietly, and is hard put to it to give me a couple of hundred a year."

"Then I can't see how you can expect to marry the daughter of a very rich man like Hugh Marten."

"Heaven help me, neither do I!"

"Yet you have contrived to fall in love with her?"

"That was beyond my control. She has told you what happened. I fought hard against what the world calls a piece of folly. I—avoided her. There is, there can be, no sort of engagement between us, unless——"

"Unless what?"

"Oh, it is a stupid thing to say, but you American millionaires do occasionally get hipped by the other fellow. If Marten came a cropper, I'd have my chance."

Power laughed quietly. "You are a true Briton," he said. "You think there is no security for money except in trustee stocks. Well, I won't disturb your faith. Now, I want you to call on Mr. Marten to-morrow and ask him formally for his daughter's hand."

"Then the fat *will* be in the fire." Evidently, Philip and Nancy were well mated.

"Possibly; but it is the proper thing to do."

"But, Mr. Power, you can't have considered your suggestion fully. Suppose Mr. Marten even condescends to listen? His first question floors me. I have my pay and two hundred a year. I don't know a great deal about the cost of ladies' clothes, but I rather imagine my little lot would about buy Nancy's hats."

"In this changeable climate she would certainly catch a severe cold. But you are going to tell Mr. Marten that the day you and Nancy sign a marriage contract your father will settle half a million sterling on you, and half a million on Nancy. So the fat spilled in the fire should cause a really fine flare-up."

Military training confers calmness and self-control in an emergency; but the Honorable Philip Lindsay ob-

viously thought that his new friend had suddenly gone mad.

"I really thought you understood the position," he began again laboriously. "I haven't gone into the calculation, but I should say, offhand, that our place in Scotland wouldn't yield half a million potatoes."

"To speak plainly, then, I mean to give you the money; but it must come through the Earl of Colonsay. Further, if Marten hums and haws about the amount, ascertain what sum will satisfy him. A million between you, in hard cash, ought to suffice, because Marten has many millions of his own."

Lindsay could not choose but believe; for Power had an extra measure of the faculty of convincing his fellow-men. He stammered, almost dumfounded:

"You make a most generous offer, an amazingly generous one. You almost deprive me of words. But I must ask—why?"

"Because, had life been kinder, Nancy would have been my daughter and not Marten's. Yours is a proper question, and I have answered it; so I hope you will leave my explanation just where it stands. I mean to enlighten you more fully in one respect. Your host, Mr. Dacre, is a well-known man, and you will probably accept what he says as correct. After dinner I shall ask him to tell you that I can provide a million sterling on any given date without difficulty."

"Mad as it sounds, Mr. Power, I believe you implicitly."

"You must get rid of that habit where money is concerned. If you appease Mr. Marten, you will have control of a great sum, and you should learn at the

outset to take no man's unsupported word regarding its disposal o. investment."

Lindsay went to his room with the manner of a man walking on air. Nothing that he had ever heard or read compared in any degree with the fantastic events of the last hour. He could not help accepting Power's statement; yet every lesson of life combated its credibility. It is not surprising, therefore, that he should be nervous and distrait when he reappeared; but Dacre soon put him at ease.

"Power has been telling me how he took your breath away, Mr. Lindsay," he said. "But that is a way he has. When you and he are better acquainted you will cease to marvel at anything he says, or does. On this one point, however, I want to speak quite emphatically. Mr. Power is certainly in a position to give you a million pounds if he chooses, and, bearing in mind the history of his early life, and the high esteem in which he held Nancy Marten's mother, I can sympathize with and appreciate the motives which inspire his present effort to secure that young lady's happy marriage."

But this incident is set down here merely to show how Power tried to make smooth the way by using his wealth. He himself placed no reliance in its efficacy. Lindsay went to Valescure Castle in high feather; but came back angered and perplexed. Marten had listened politely. There was not the least semblance of annoyance in his manner. He simply dismissed the suitor with quiet civility. When Lindsay, stung to protest, raised the question of finances, the other heard him out patiently.

"In different conditions I might have been inclined to consider your claim," he said, when Lindsay had made an end. "Allow me to congratulate you on your position, which renders you a suitable *parti* for almost any alliance—except with my daughter. No, believe me, my decision is final," for he could not know how ironical was his compliment, and took the young man's uneasy gesture as heralding a renewal of the argument. "Miss Marten is pledged elsewhere. She will marry Prince Montecastello."

"I have reason to know, sir, that the gentleman you have mentioned is utterly distasteful to Nancy," broke in the other.

Marten's face darkened; he lost some of his suave manner. "Have you been carrying on a clandestine courtship with my daughter?" he asked.

"No. A man bearing my name has no reason to shun daylight. That I have not sought your sanction earlier is due to the fact that I did not dream of marrying Nancy until a stroke of good fortune enabled me to come to you almost on an equal footing. Perhaps I have put that awkwardly, but my very anxiety clogs my tongue. Nancy and I love each other. She hates this Italian. Surely that is a good reason why you, her father, should not rule me out of court so positively."

Marten rose and touched an electric bell. It jarred in some neighboring passage, and rang the knell of Lindsay's hopes.

"I think we understand each other," he said, with chilling indifference. "My answer is no, Mr. Lind-

say, and I look to you, as a man of honor, not to see or write to my daughter again."

Now, it is not in the Celtic nature to brook such an undeservedly contemptuous dismissal; but Power had counseled his protégé to keep his temper, whatever happened. Still, he could not leave Marten in the belief that his stipulation was accepted.

"I give no pledge of that sort," he said dourly.

"Very well. It means simply that Miss Marten will be protected from you."

"In what way?"

Marten laughed, a trifle scornfully. "You are young, Mr. Lindsay," he said, "or you would see that you are speaking at random. I hear a footman coming. He will show you out. But, before you go, let me inform you that, so long as you remain in this part of Devonshire, Miss Marten will have less liberty of action than usual; and that will be vexing, because she is interested in some bazaar——"

Then Lindsay's frank gaze sought and held the coldly hostile eyes of the man who was insulting him. "In that event," he broke in, "you leave me no option but to state that I return to Aldershot by the first available train. It would appear, Mr. Marten, that I value your daughter's happiness rather more than you do."

He went out defeated, but every inch a cavalier. No sword clanked at his heels; yet he held his head high, though his soul was torn with despair. He saw nothing of Nancy. She had gone for a ride into the wilds of Exmoor, and had not the least notion that her lover passed through the gates of Valescure an hour before she entered them.

Power heard Lindsay's broken story in silence. Even Marten's callous threat of confining Nancy to the bounds of the castle left him outwardly unmoved.

"I am not altogether unprepared for your failure," he said gently, when the disconsolate Lindsay had told him exactly what had occurred. "I compliment you on your attitude. As might be expected, you said and did just the right things. I approve of your decision to rejoin your regiment at once. The next step is to prevent Nancy from acting precipitately. I think all may be well, even yet. But you agree that it was necessary you should see Mr. Marten and declare your position?"

"It certainly seems to have settled matters once and for all," came the depressed answer.

"By no means. It has opened the campaign. It is a declaration of war. I need hardly advise you not to have a faint heart where such a fair lady is the prize. No, no, Nancy is not yet the Princess Montecastello, nor will she ever be. *You* may not marry her, Mr. Lindsay; but *he* will not. I shall clear that obstacle from your path, at all events, and, it may be, assist you materially. My offer still holds good—remember that. For the rest, be content to leave the whole affair to me during the next three weeks. Don't write to Nancy. It will do no good. I'll tell her you were here, why you came, and why you went. Do you trust me?"

"'Pon my soul, I do!" said Lindsay, and their hands met in a reassuring grip.

A servant entered, bringing a cablegram. It read:

"Cable received. Everything in order. MAC."

Then Power smiled wearily; for the real struggle was postponed until that sealed envelop reached him. There followed some disturbing days. He told Nancy of her lover's visit, and its outcome, and had to allay her fears as best he could. Then, on the day of the bazaar, when he hoped to have many hours of her company, he discovered, in the nick of time, that Marten and the whole house-party from the castle had accompanied her; so he remained away.

Next morning he received a letter:

"Dear Mr. Power.—My father, by some means, has heard that you and I have become friends. He has forbidden me ever to meet you again, or to write. I am disobeying him this once, because I cannot bring myself to cut adrift from a friendship dear to me without one word of explanation. All at once my bright world is becoming gray and threatening. I am miserable, and full of foreboding. But I remain, and shall ever be,

"Your sincere friend and well-wisher,

"NANCY MARTEN."

That same day Howard returned from the Continent. He brought a full budget. But, in a time when the world was even grayer for Power than for Nancy, one person contrived to give him a very real and pleasurable surprise. On the twelfth day after he had received MacGonigal's cablegram a man in the uniform of a London commissionaire brought him a big linen envelop, profusely sealed. He chanced to

be out when the messenger came; so the man awaited him in the hall. He rose and saluted Power when a house-servant indicated him.

"The gentleman who sent this package from London was very particular, sir, that it should be given into your own hands," he explained. "He also instructed me to ask for a receipt written by yourself."

"Indeed. What is the gentleman's name?" inquired Power, scrutinizing the envelop to see if the address would enlighten him.

"Name of MacGonigal, sir,"

"What?"

"Yes, sir, MacGonigal. A stout gentleman, sir, an American, and very dry. He made me laugh like anything. Talked about holdups, and road agents, and landslides on the railway, he did. Oh, very dry!"

MacGonigal himself cleared up the mystery:

"Dear Derry [he wrote].—I wasn't taking any chances; so I've brought that little parcel myself. Time I saw London, anyhow, and here I am. A man in our consulate tells me these boys with medals and crossbars are O. K., and one of them is making the next train. I didn't come myself, because I don't know how you are fixed; but I'll stand around till I hear from you. London is some size. I think I'll like it when I learn the language.

"Yours,

"Mac."

Power's first impulse, warmly supported by Dacre, was to telegraph and bid the wanderer come straight to Devonshire. But he decided unwillingly to wait un-

til he had won or lost the coming battle. He telegraphed, of course, and told MacGonigal to enjoy life till they met, which would be in the course of three days, at the uttermost. Then he retired, and spent many hours in writing, refusing Howard's help, and taking a meal in his own room. It was long after midnight when his task was ended; but he appeared at the breakfast-table in the best of health and spirits.

Dacre, aware of something unusual and disturbing in his friend's attitude of late, was glad to see this pleasant change, and talked of a long-deferred drive into the heart of Dartmoor.

"Tomorrow," agreed Power cheerfully. "I am calling at Valescure Castle this morning, and the best hours of the day will be lost before I am at liberty."

Dacre had the invaluable faculty of passing lightly over the gravest concerns of life. He had noticed the abrupt termination of Power's friendship with Nancy, and guessed its cause; but he made no effort now to dissuade the other from a visit which was so pregnant of evil.

When the meal was ended Power summoned his secretary to a short conclave. Then he entered a carriage, and was driven to the castle by the roundabout road. He could have walked there in less time; but his reason for appearing in state became evident when he alighted at the main entrance, and a footman hurried to the door.

"Mr. Marten in?" he inquired.

"Yes, sir."

"Is he in the library?"

"Yes, sir."

"Kindly take me to him."

"What name, sir?"

Power gave his name, and followed close on the man heels, and the servant did not dare bid such a distinguished-looking visitor wait in the hall. Still, he hastened on in front, knocked at a door, and said:

"Mr. John Darien Power to see you, sir."

"Tell Mr. Power——" came a stern voice; but too late to be effective, for Power was in the room.

"You can tell me yourself, Mr. Marten," he said quietly. "I'm sorry to thrust myself in on you in this way; but it was necessary, as my business is important and will brook no delay."

Marten had risen from a table littered with papers. A cold light gleamed in his eyes; but he had the sense and courage to refrain from creating a scene before the discomfited footman.

"You may go," he said to the man, and the door closed.

"Now, Mr. Power," he continued, "we are alone, and, whatever your business, I must inform you that your presence here is an unwelcome intrusion."

"May I ask why?"

"I mean to make that quite clear. In the first place, I have learned, to my astonishment, that you have wormed your way into my daughter's confidence, and thereby brought about the only approach to a quarrel that has marred our relations. Secondly—but the one reason should suffice. I do not desire to have any communication with you or hear anything you have to say, or explain. Is that definite enough?"

Power turned suddenly, locked the door, and put the key in his pocket.

"How dare you?" Marten almost shouted.

"I had to answer, and I chose the most effective method," was the calm reply. "Your long experience of life should have taught you that there are times and seasons when closing the ears is ineffectual. The wise man listens, even to his worst enemy. Then he weighs. Ultimately, he decides. That is what you are going to do now. Won't you be seated? And may I sit down? Promise me we shall not be interrupted till I have finished, and I'll unlock the door."

Marten had not spoken to Power, nor, to his knowledge, seen him, for twenty-three years. The young and enthusiastic engineer he had sent to the Sacramento placer mine had developed into a man whose appearance and words would sway any gathering, no matter how eminent or noteworthy its component members. For some reason, utterly hidden from the financier's ken,—for he was not one likely to recognize the magnetic aura which seemed to emanate from Power in his contact with men generally,—he was momentarily cowed. He sank back into the chair he had just quitted, but said, truculently enough:

"It would certainly be less melodramatic if my servants could enter the room should I be summoned in haste."

Power unlocked the door, and drew up a chair facing his unwilling host.

"I am here," he began, "to urge on you the vital necessity of dismissing the Principe del Montecastello from your house, and of permitting the announcement

of Nancy's forthcoming marriage with the Honorable Philip Lindsay, son of the Earl of Colonsay——"

"I guessed as much," broke in Marten wrathfully. "Colonsay is as poor as a church mouse. It was *your* money which that young prig paraded before my astonished eyes."

"I thought it advisable to state the motive of my visit frankly," said Power. "I take it you are not inclined to discuss the matter in an amicable way; though I am at a loss to understand why—before I have reached any of the points I want you to consider—you are so markedly hostile both to me and to my purpose."

"Then I'll tell you," and Marten took a letter from a portfolio on the table. "It appears that my late father-in-law, Francis Willard, had taken your measure more accurately than I. I remember treating you as a trustworthy subordinate; but your conduct during my temporary absence from America at a certain period led him to regard you as unprincipled and knavish. He has been dead several years; but he still lives to watch you. He left funds with a firm of lawyers in New York to carry out his instructions, which were that, if ever you were found hanging about any place where I or any member of my family was residing, I should be warned against you, because, owing to his action, and that alone, my dear wife was saved from something worse than a mere indiscretion in which you were the prime factor. A dead hand can reach far sometimes. On this occasion it has stretched across the Atlantic. The communication I received a few days ago is quite explicit.

These lawyers have, at times, been much troubled to discover your whereabouts; but, on this occasion, their English agents have kept their eyes open."

"'Can vengeance be pursued farther than death?'" murmured Power, shocked by this revelation of Willard's undying hatred.

The other did not recognize the quotation.

"Yes, and what is more," he snarled, "they go on to say that Willard has intrusted a document to their care which will scare you effectually if this present remonstrance is unavailing. In that event, they will act on their own initiative, and not through me. I wonder what the precious scandal is?"

"I am here to make it known, known beyond reach of doubt or dispute."

Marten moved uneasily. He tossed the letter back into the portfolio, and glared at Power in silence for a few seconds.

"I neither care to hear your secrets nor mean to attach any significance to them when heard," he said, at last. "My only anxiety is to prevent you from sapping my daughter's affections from me. Damn you, you have caused the one cloud that has come between us!"

"I, too, have Nancy's welfare at heart."

"I don't see what good purpose you serve by alluding to my daughter in that impertinently familiar way."

"Now we are close to the heart of the mystery. Nancy is not your daughter! She is my daughter!"

Marten leaned back in his chair, and glowered at the self-possessed man who had uttered these extraor-

dinary words so calmly. His voice was tinged with sadness, it is true, but otherwise wholly devoid of emotion.

"Do you realize what you are saying?" demanded the older man, and the words came thickly, as though he spoke with difficulty.

"Yes."

"But such raving is not argument. I thought you remarked that you were here to convince me of the error of my ways."

Power produced an envelop, and extracted some papers. "Read!" he said, leaning forward and thrusting the folded sheets before Marten. "The letters quoted there are not in original, of course. I have left those in safe-keeping, and they will be burnt on the day I know for certain that my daughter is married to the man she loves. Read! Note the dates! I need not say another word. I have supplied such brief explanatory passages as are required. I was not aware that Mowlem & Son had tendered other evidence. Though slight, it is helpful."

And Marten read, and his face, dark and lowering as he began, soon faded to the tint of old ivory. For his hawk's eyes were perusing the story of his own and Willard's perfidy, and of his wife's revolt, and love, and final surrender. It was soon told. Nancy's pitiful scrawl, left in the hut by the lake, Willard's letter to Mrs. Power, the two cablegrams, and Nancy's two letters from London—these, with Power's notes, giving chapter and verse for his arrival at Newport, his flight with Nancy into the Adirondacks, and her departure with Willard, made up a document hard

to disbelieve, almost impossible to gainsay. Some dry and faded strands of white heather had fallen from among the papers to the table, and Marten gave no heed to them at first. Now he knew he was gazing at the remnants of Nancy's bridal bouquet.

The husband whom she loathed and had deserted, who was so detestable in her sight that she died rather than remain his wife, did not attempt to deny the truth of that overwhelming indictment. Indeed, its opening passages, laying bare his own scheming, must have convinced him of the accuracy of the remainder. With the painstaking care of one to whom the written word was all-important, he read and reread each letter, particularly Nancy's pathetic farewell. Then, darting one wolfish glance at Power, he thrust his right hand suddenly toward a drawer. Power was prepared for some such movement, and leaped with a lightning spring born of many a critical adventure in wild lands, when a fraction of a second of delay meant all the difference between life and death. Marten was not a weakling; but he was no match for the younger man's well-trained muscles. After a brief struggle the automatic pistol he had taken from its hiding-place was wrested from his grasp.

"You may shoot, if you like, when I have finished with you, but not before," said Power, when his breathless adversary seemed to be in a fit condition to follow what he was saying. "I am prepared to die, and by your hand if you think fit to be my executioner; but first you must know the penalty. If I do not return to my friend's house before a fixed hour, an exact copy of all that you have read will be sent to the father

and uncle of that detestable blackguard you have chosen to marry my daughter. It seems that Italians are blessed with fine-drawn scruples in such matters, and the revelation of a blot in Nancy's parentage will be fatal to your precious project. Copies will also be given to Nancy herself, and to Philip Lindsay. If I know anything of men, I fancy that he, at any rate, will not flout her because of her mother's sin. In the event of my death, she becomes my heiress; so she will be quite independent of your bounty, and, after the first shock and horror of comprehension has passed, I think she has enough of her mother's spirit, and of my fairly strong will, to defy any legal rights you may try to enforce as her reputed father. I am talking with brutal plainness, Marten, because you've got to understand that you are beaten to your knees. Now I'll repeat my terms. Dismiss an unspeakable cad from your house—not forcibly, of course, but with sufficient conviction that he cannot refuse to go—agree to Nancy's marriage with the man of her choice—and she should wait another year, at least, whether or not Lindsay be the man—and I burn everything, copies and originals, on her wedding day. Refuse, and you know the sure outcome. There is your pistol. It should do its work well at this short range. Shoot, if you must! I am ready!"

CHAPTER XX

THE PASSING OF THE STORM

MARTEN'S hand closed round the butt of the pistol, and, during a few seconds, Power thought that he was a doomed man. Even in England, a land where deeds of violence are not condoned by lawless unwritten law, he knew he was in deadly peril. If Marten shot him, there was reasonable probability that punishment might not follow the crime. His own actions would bear out the contention that Marten had killed him in self-defense. He had palpably forced his way in; the warning letter from the New York lawyers would count against him; legal ingenuity could twist in Marten's favor the very means he was using to safeguard Nancy's child. But he did not fear death. Rather did he look on it as the supreme atonement. "Greater love hath no man than this, that he lay down his life for his friend," and, in giving his life for an innocent girl, he was surely obeying her mother's last request.

But Marten, still clutching the pistol—a modern weapon of fearsome effect when fired in conditions which made faulty aim impossible—seemed to be marshaling his disrupted thoughts. His eyes were veiled, his body was bent as though old age had suddenly beset him; but the ivory-white of cheeks and forehead was yielding slowly to the quickening of the arteries caused by the recent struggle.

At last he looked at Power, and may have been surprised by the discovery that his adversary, though standing within a yard of him, obviously disregarded his presence, and was, in fact, staring through a window at the far horizon of the blue Atlantic.

For the first time he was aware of an expression in Power's face that was baffling, almost unnerving. Suffering, pity, sympathy, well-doing—these essentials had never found lodgment in his own nature, and their legible imprint on another's features was foreign to his eyes. He was wholly self-centered, self-contained. To his material mind men and women were mere elements in the alchemy of gold-making; yet here stood one who had never sought the gross treasures which earth seemed to delight in showering on him. And he could win what Marten had never won—love. That thought rankled. Already Nancy was yielding to his influence. Unless——

He replaced the pistol in the drawer where it was kept, ever within reach—he had ruined opponents by the score, and some were vengeful. The movement awoke Power from a species of trance, and their eyes met.

"You win," said Marten laconically.

Power sat down again. The simplicity of his self-effacement almost bewildered the other, on whom the knowledge was forced that, had he raised and pointed the death-dealing weapon, his enemy would have disregarded him.

"I want to ask you a few questions," he continued bruskly. "I suppose you and I can afford now to

tell each other the naked truth. Why are you raising all this commotion after twenty years?"

"I am only fulfilling the mandate given in—in your wife's last letter."

"My wife. You admit then, that she *was* my wife?"

Power did not answer, and Marten tingled with the quick suspicion that he was opening up the very line of inquiry in which he was most vulnerable.

"Anyhow, let us endeavor to forget what happened twenty years ago," he went on, affecting a generosity of sentiment he was far from feeling. "What I wish to understand is this—how do you reconcile your regret, or repentance, or whatever you choose to call it, for bygone deeds, with your attempt now to come between me and my daughter. Yes, damn you, whatever you may say or do, you cannot rob me of the nineteen years of affection which at least one person in the world has given me!"

Power passed unheeded that sudden flame of passionate resentment.

"It is natural, in a sense, that you should misread the actual course of events," he said. "You may not be aware that I have been a constant visitor to this part of Devonshire during many years, and that, in hiring Valescure, you were really seeking me instead of me, as you imagine, seeking you. I met Nancy by accident. We became friends. It was the impulse of a girl deprived of the one adviser in whom she should have complete trust that led her to confide in me."

"What do you mean by that?"

"You, her loved and honored father, were using your authority to force her into a hated marriage."

"I didn't treat matters so seriously. I never heard of this young Lindsay as a candidate before last week."

"Had you taken a tenth part of the trouble it has cost me, you would have ascertained that the Principe del Montecastello was about as suitable a mate for Nancy as a carrion crow for a linnet."

"He was a bit wild in his youth, but would become a model husband. I know that type of man well. At fifty he would be taking the chair at rescue meetings."

Again Power remained silent, and Marten was obliged to reopen the discussion.

"I'll get rid of Montecastello," he said, and his voice had the metallic rasp of a file in it. "I'll undertake, too, that my daughter shall be free to marry Philip Lindsay, or any other man of her choice. I suppose it will b. Lindsay. I'll invite him here, and make up for my rather emphatic dismissal the other day. But i you impose terms, so do I. To avoid a scandal, to keep my daughter's love during the remaining years of my life, I yield to you on the major point. On my side, I stipulate that not one penny of your money goes to either Lindsay or Nancy. They must owe everything to me, not to you. Further, you must undertake to go out of my daughter's life completely. You have contrived to do that in the past; you must manage it in the future as well."

"You mean that I am never voluntarily to see or speak to her again?"

"Yes."

"I promise that."

Power spoke in a low tone, but a note of unutterable

sadness crept into the words. Even his bitter and resentful hearer caught some hint of anguish, of final abandonment, of a dream that was dispelled.

"Now, about these papers," he said, striving to assume a business-like air. "I shall write to Mowlem & Son telling them that the Willard trust has attained its object. Sometime I shall endeavor personally to get them to hand over any document in their possession. They are only agents. They can be bought. As to these," and he tapped the sheets in Power's handwriting, "I shall keep them until you have carried out your share of the deal."

"Better not. You may die suddenly. Then they would be found."

"Die, may I? And what about you?"

"I shall not die until the future of Nancy's child is assured. In any event, I have taken steps to safeguard her secret."

Marten hesitated. Ultimately he applied a lighted match to the papers, threw them into a grate, and watched them burn and curl up in black spirals. When they were still ablaze he gathered the bits of crackling heather, and burnt them, too.

"That, then, is the end," he said.

"The beginning of the end," said Power, turning to leave the room. It was a very large apartment, and there were windows at each end. Through those on the landward side he saw Nancy riding toward the gates in company with a young married couple who had joined the house party recently.

"With your permission, I will wait a few minutes," he said. "Your daughter is just crossing the park;

but she will soon be out of sight. I'll dismiss my carriage, and walk home by the cliff path."

"Your" daughter. So he really meant to keep his word in letter and spirit! Marten thought him a strange man, a visionary. He had never met such another—undoubtedly, he was half mad!

In a little while Power walked out. Then Marten noticed, for the first time, that he moved with a slight limp; the result of some accident, no doubt. Curse him, why wasn't he killed? Then Mary Marten would have become a princess, with a small likelihood of occupying a throne. For that was Marten's carefully planned scheme. A certain princess was practically in the market. It could be had for money. Money would do anything—almost anything. Today money had failed!

. . . . . .

Power planned to take MacGonigal by surprise. He wrote with purposed vagueness as to his arrival in London, meaning to drop in on his old friend unexpectedly. He arrived about six o'clock in the evening at the big hotel where Mac was installed, and was informed that "Mr. MacGonigal" was out, but might return at any moment. He secured a suite of rooms, and was crossing the entrance hall, with no other intent than to sit there and await Mac's appearance, when he almost cannoned against a woman—a woman with lustrous, penetrating brown eyes. What was worse, he stood stock still, and stared at her in a way that might well evoke her indignation.

But, if she was annoyed, she masked her feelings under an amused smile.

"You don't recall me, of course, Mr. Power," she said; "but I remember you quite well—even after twenty years!"

"Meg!" he cried.

She reddened somewhat. Though wearing a hat and an out-of-doors costume, she was uneveiled, and there was no trace of scar or disfigurement on her face.

"Marguerite Sinclair, at any rate," she answered.

"Sent here by the gods!" he muttered.

"Your gods are false gods, Mr. Power. I, for one, don't recognize them as guides."

"Marguerite Sinclair!" he went on. "So you are unmarried?"

"And you?" she retorted.

"I? I am free, at last."

"Free?"

"Yes. Come with me. We can find a seat somewhere. If you have any engagement, you must break it."

She dropped her veil hurriedly. If there are tears in a woman's eyes, she does not care to have the fact noticed while she is crossing the crowded foyer of a hotel. Manlike, Power attributed her action to the wrong cause.

"Why hide your face?" he said, striving hard to control an unaccountable tremolo in his voice. "What have you been doing? Praying at Lourdes?"

She did not pretend to misunderstand: "A French doctor worked this particular miracle. The chief ingredients were some months of suffering and the skin of eggs. It was not vanity on my part. I was tired of the world's pity."

"Then, thank Heaven, I loved you before your scientist doubled your good looks!"

They had found two chairs in a palm-shaded corner, and Marguerite raised her veil again. Then he saw why she had lowered it.

"Derry," she said, and her lips quivered, "why were you so cruel?"

"I'll tell you. May I?"

"Not now. I couldn't bear it."

"Can you bear being told that I have never ceased to love you—that you have dwelt constantly in my thoughts during all these slow years?"

She bent her head. For a long time neither spoke. Plucking at a glove, she revealed a ring on her left hand—his ring! Then Power began his confession. He did not tell her everything—that was impossible. Nor was it necessary. In the first moment of their meeting he had said what she had been waiting thirteen long years to hear.

So, as the outcome, it was MacGonigal who surprised Power. A clerk at the key office gave him the name of the gentleman who had been inquiring for him, and, although taken aback by finding Power deep in talk with a lady, Mac "butted in" joyously.

The two stood up, and Power took his friend's hand.

"Mac," he said, "this is Miss Marguerite Sinclair. You'll soon be well acquainted with her. She becomes Marguerite Power at the earliest possible date."

Now, MacGonigal had formed his own conclusions, owing to the urgency of the message for that sealed packet. Anxiety, and not a desire to see life, had drawn him from his shell in Bison. Power's words

had answered many unspoken questions, solved all manner of doubts. His face shone, his big eyes bulged alarmingly. He mopped a shining forehead with, alas! a red handkerchief.

"Wall, ef I ain't dog-goned!" he vowed. "But I'm glad, mighty glad. You've worried me, Derry, an' that's a fact." He turned to Marguerite, little guessing how well she knew him. "Bring him to the ranch, Ma'am, an' keep him thar!" he said. "It'll look like home when you come along. An' that's what he wants —a home. I don't know whar he met you, nor when, but I kin tell you this—he's been like a lost dog fer thirteen years, an' it's time he was fixed with a collar an' chain. Anyhow, when he's had a good look at you, he'll not need the chain."

"Mac," said the woman with the shining eyes, "you're a dear!"

And from that moment the firm of Power and MacGonigal acquired another partner.

THE END